

# “Violated Specialness”: Western Political Representations of Tibet.<sup>1</sup>

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**T**IBETANS have not always accepted foreign representations of their country without complaint. “I suppose our distant country holds little of interest for your public except for what of the strange can be written about it, and so you get a strange picture of us. The most absurd and the most scandalous things are said about us, and ... your writers often contradict each other,” wrote Rinchen Lhamo of her experiences in London at the beginning of the last century.[2] Western remarks about Tibetans were, in her eyes, often condescending, inaccurate and self-contradictory. Of one official who had described Tibetans as “a simple people” she commented “his remark was so wide of the fact that I could not refrain from laughing ... He knows we are not so ... He was merely giving utterance to a conventional statement about us put into vogue by the travellers.”

Her criticism of the unnamed official provides a fascinating demonstration of Tibetan self-definition and self-representation some fifty or more years before such terms became fashionable; similar comments can be found in the writings of Tibetan essayists today.[3] Such observations, however, leave unresolved the question as to what relation there might be between Tibetan and Western sources of representation—whether, that is, Tibetans are to be regarded as merely passive subjects in the process whereby views are generated by outsiders about them, or whether this process is one of the engagement of different voices in contradiction or competition, or even a concurrence of some sort between the various parties. In particular, the tolerance by Tibetan officials and policy-makers of such forms of representation raises the possibility that Western condescension towards Tibetans may sometimes be seen as part of a strategy or a political culture among Tibetan leaders according to which the encouragement of de-agentizing views by foreigners was considered expedient or even advantageous.

In this paper I try to map ways in which the Western representation of Tibet that Rinchen Lhamo had so strongly criticized has appeared in political texts in the West since the mid-1980s, and to examine the

impact of such representations on the policies of foreign governments. In doing so, I am responding to recent reductionist depictions of Tibetans engaged in the contemporary political and cultural domains, more or less trapped subjects of Western constructions.[4] My study takes a different approach, looking at representations in terms of their functions and intended effects. In particular, I suggest that, rather than merely responding to Western discourses which emerged following the expansion of the Tibetan advocacy movement in late 1987, exile Tibetan policy-makers were already by then encouraging this trend as part of an intended and considered strategy. In doing so, they were continuing a tradition of Tibetan political self-representation, using images which were developed in Lhasa long before the Chinese invasion and which they have continued to shape and reconstruct in response to changes in their conditions and objectives.

## Political Concepts as Imaginary Representations

Statements produced by political institutions are often viewed in terms of outcome and policy rather than as images, but in this paper I try to look at them initially as if they were literary texts, since it seems to me that they too involve the generation of largely imaginary representations. Political representations differ from literary works in that they include an implicit offer of certain benefits for their supporters if their proponents are able to acquire the power to put them into action, but they share the features of other forms of representation, amongst which is their tendency to contain contradictions that expose them to weaknesses and instabilities of one kind or another. I have tried to indicate how this process of inherent disintegration is especially marked and significant with regard to political representations, and how it has led Tibetan leaders to seek constantly to adapt and modify the Western circulation of these views.

Treating representations of political status or nationhood as texts of the imagination does not, of course, mean that they have no effect, validity or plausibility, since clearly this is not the case. They can be seen, in my view, as constituting the collective imagining by a great number of people of a description of their identity and their relations, which is organized around a selected principle or idea to which they ascribe the certainty of fact. This also means that these texts are, albeit in complex ways, authored: they arise because people produce them, not because of some reality that allows only a single interpretation.

I offer this formulation to make it easier to follow the complexities of the political debate over Tibet, since it seems to me that that discussion has been characterized by the collection of facts of different kinds in order to ascribe certainty to one or other of these organizing ideas or imaginary representations. Seen in this way, the debate between China and Western promoters of Tibetan claims is not really a debate—in other words, it is not a process in which arguments either to facts or to interpretations are put forward by each side with the intent that the most persuasive argument wins. It is more the presentation by each side of a strongly held collective imagining that is persuasive only to those who already share that imagining. In the Chinese case, the appeal is often to those who already share the envisaging of China as an integrated nation-state with its borders delineated in some ancient, loosely defined but inviolable historical past.[5] In the case of the foreign supporters of the Tibetan case, their appeals are often based on a notion or principle that is held to be pre-existent or overriding—such as the right of a nation to independence or to the right of a people to cultural or religious freedom—and which in the Tibetan case is seen to have been violated. In both cases primordiality is the driving force of the argument: on the one hand, China has existed as a unified state including Tibet for centuries, and on the other, Tibetan culture, identity or society has existed independently for millennia.

Focusing, as I do here, on the views or strategies of Western politicians does not mean that these are crucial or even particularly influential in the situation in Tibet—among the views held by outsiders, it is the attitudes of Chinese leaders and individuals that have the greatest influence on the lives and the futures of Tibetans. But there is less need to apologize for focusing on Western rather than Chinese political views than one might at first expect, because both positions have much in common. The romanticism and exoticization, for example, which many observers have found pervading Western writings about Tibet, is also typical of much Chinese writing on this subject, and not only in the descriptions of noble primitivism that constitute much of the work of the “root-seeking” school of Chinese literature.[6] Official and semi-official Chinese texts, especially those by scientists, refer routinely to Tibet as “the Land of Snows” or “the Rooftop of the World”; there is even fierce competition among

officials in certain areas of China to claim the title of being the original Shangri-La.[7] There is, however, a more telling similarity between Western and Chinese representations of Tibetans: both tend to treat them as objects in stories of heroic achievement by outsiders, or as victims of abuse who are incapable of agency. Perhaps this similarity should not surprise us overmuch, since both the Western and the Chinese accounts arise within societies with histories as invaders or would-be invaders of the Tibetan plateau—the British in 1903, the Chinese in 1910 and 1950, and (to a limited extent) the Americans in the guerilla campaign from 1956–73.[8] The history of Western invasion and incursions of Tibet has, however, been missing from Western political texts produced about Tibet since the 1980s, and the possibility that Western intervention might have been as much a cause as a solution in China's annexation of Tibet has not been aired in this debate.[9] Instead, the emphasis in Western accounts has been on Tibet as virgin territory untouched until the arrival of the PLA.

## Violation and the Zone of Specialness

Western political discourse about Tibet, in the sense of formal statements by political bodies and representatives, was quiescent throughout the 1970s, once China had achieved its rapprochement with the United States and been re-admitted to the UN in 1971; until then Tibet had been part of an anti-Chinese, Cold War agenda. In 1985 it re-emerged as an issue in the Western political domain when a group of 91 American Senators, probably organized by the exile leadership in Dharamsala, wrote to Li Xiannian, then President of the PRC.[10] That year the issue was raised by a non-governmental organization in the UN, probably the first time the issue had been addressed there or in any major forum for some fifteen years.[11]

Since that time the dominant form in which Tibet has been put forward in Western and exile political discussions has involved the image of a zone of specialness, uniqueness, distinctiveness or excellence that has been threatened, violated or abused. The circulation of this image in recent political discussion seems to have stemmed largely from decisions made by the exile Tibetan leadership at a series of strategy meetings held between 1985 and 1987.[12] At these meetings, which followed the collapse of negotiations with the Chinese in 1984, the exile leaders asked the Dalai Lama for the first time to give political speeches abroad, and probably decided on the topics and images to be used in that campaign and in his speeches. In doing this they reverted to the policies of the 1940s, before the Chinese annexation, when a similar appeal to the West had been made: at that time too Tibetan leaders had used the notion of Tibetan uniqueness as a principal tool in their diplomacy.[13]

The representations of Tibet that emerged in Western discussions following the Dalai Lama's speeches in the late 1980s focused on the uniqueness and the violation of Tibet. In some more recent cases, as we shall see, the violation is seen as a result of advancing modernity or commercialization in general, a view that implicitly exonerates the state as a perpetrator of abuse. But usually this violation is identified with acts of violence, desecration or intolerance that have been carried out by the Chinese authorities, whether these are seen as the Chinese Communist Party, the government, the military or even individual citizens. In many cases this idea of violation seems to be linked to a perception of the place or the people as previously unimpaired, and now desecrated, as if for the first time. "The rape of Tibet is going on," a politician told a 1999 hearing of the US Congress,[14] articulating an image that lies within much of the language of violation found in discussions of Tibet.[15] As in cases elsewhere of women depicted as victims of rape, such imagery tends to disempower its subjects by implying that they are either victims who are incapable of standing alone, or collaborators in the act of violation. This image thus risks being politically counter-productive: it carries within it a pervasive implication of Tibetan innocence and victimhood, suggesting that Tibetans are incapable of effective action or decision-making.

The imagery of sexual relations does not belong only to one side of the political spectrum: many texts within Chinese political discourse also speak of Tibet as a sexual innocent.[16] There, however, the imagery involves marriage rather than violation, and the innocence is male, a result not of moral purity but of a lack of sophistication or modernity—in other words, an excess of barbarity. In this view, the newcomer in the liaison is not a male violator but a non-violent female who brings knowledge and advanced culture. This is the paramount image in Chinese official and unofficial writing about Tibet's relationship with China, and is found in its purest form in the frequently repeated accounts of the marriage of the seventh-century Tibetan ruler Srongtsen Gampo with the Chinese Princess Wencheng,

who brings with her to Tibet ink, music, agriculture, geomancy, and other Tang dynasty technologies.<sup>[17]</sup> Here, marriage is a metaphor for China's civilizing mission towards backward peoples; it is thus very similar to the Chinese view of their modernization project in Tibet in contemporary times, and very close to the romantic view in the 1980s "root-seeking" school of literature of Tibetans as noble savages. Foregro

Such images of specialness, sexual union or violation, are used as broad, generalizing metaphors for the foreign encounter with a society, place or nation. They tend to rely on the application of a single characteristic to an entire culture or people, just as earlier writers who saw Tibet as a Shangri-La or as a feudal hell generalized their perceptions of spiritual accomplishment or social brutality. Thus in the Chinese case the language of socialist demonology is often mined for negative depictions to show Tibet as, for example, a barbarian needing civilizing.<sup>[18]</sup> At other times the terminology of social and national evolution is used to locate present-day Tibetans at a lower stage on the scale of evolution, and thus in need of assistance to progress to a more advanced stage: "Our overall purpose is to strive to construct a united, wealthy and civilized New Tibet!" as the Chinese reformer Hu Yaobang put it in 1980.<sup>[19]</sup> In Western depictions, terms such as peace, tolerance and religion—probably borrowed from relevant texts of international norms—are reproduced in their adjectival forms in representations of Tibet, or Tibetans, to define them as peaceful, tolerant or religious; in some cases the process is extended to superlatives, so that Tibetans are presented as the most advanced collective embodiment so far of this or that form of specialness.<sup>[20]</sup>

In each of the various forms in which this theme of violated specialness appears in Western political texts can be found a number of internal contradictions or weaknesses that diminish over time the effectiveness of that representation as discourse in the political arena. Indeed, one of these variations appears less and less often in political texts apparently because it is too vulnerable to contradiction—the view that Tibetans are intrinsically non-violent. Although one British parliamentarian referred to it in 1999—"the Tibetans were a good and peaceful people—tending their gardens, growing vegetables and flowers, loving children and dogs," as she put it<sup>[21]</sup>—its use has diminished among professional politicians in the West during the 1990s; instead they have preferred more subtle, less essentialist phraseology about the "path of non-violent resistance" pursued by the Tibetans, which suggests a choice rather than an inherent quality.<sup>[22]</sup> Even this phraseology has led to occasional embarrassment for less careful politicians who had suggested that non-violence has been the Tibetans' sole strategy rather than a recent choice, since the history of recent Tibetan armed resistance, and some accounts of internal political violence,<sup>[23]</sup> are now well known.

Western politicians seem instead to have gravitated progressively towards three related versions of this representation: Tibet as a site of cultural, religious or environmental specialness. "The world has witnessed the sad and almost total destruction of Tibet's unique culture and religion, and has done precious little to end the extraordinary repression," a US Congressman said in 1999.<sup>[24]</sup> Language of this sort is apparently derived from the phrase "Tibet's unique culture," which has appeared in most of the political speeches given by the Dalai Lama after 1987, when he first began to speak on this subject abroad. Similar language can be found in resolutions put to parliaments, and in some cases passed by them, in Russia, France, Belgium, Germany, Australia, the US and other countries.<sup>[25]</sup> More extreme versions of this representation can also be found in speeches by individual parliamentarians, notably those that describe the Tibetans as a collective embodiment of religiosity or as the only society or state apart from the Vatican to be entirely religious. Again, parliamentary and government texts tend (at least explicitly) to avoid such absolute claims, instead referring only to the uniqueness or, more often, the distinctiveness of Tibetan religion or culture, and asserting that its survival is under threat from the Chinese authorities. It was this representation of Tibet as a violated religious zone that was the basis of the 1985 submission on Tibet in the UN,<sup>[26]</sup> the first since the admission of the PRC to that body in 1971 had halted the earlier efforts to raise the Tibet issue.

Although parliamentary initiatives in the late 1980s had talked about Tibet's unique culture and religion, by the early 1990s, perhaps stirred by the activism on the Tibet issue of Petra Kelly and the Green Party in Germany, parliamentary language about Tibet had started to include references to the environment, and sometimes to the idea that ecological deterioration in Tibet threatened South Asia and other regions. A European Parliament resolution was passed in 1992 "deploring the destruction wrought on the natural environment of Tibet by ... the ruthless exploitation of the country's natural resources" which it said had

"resulted in major deforestation around the upper reaches of Asia's greatest rivers, with catastrophic implications for the future of the region." [27] Much of this language also came from the Dalai Lama's writing about a primordial Tibet: Foregro

*Prior to the Chinese invasion, Tibet was an unspoiled wilderness sanctuary in a unique natural environment. Sadly, in the past decades the wildlife and forests of Tibet have been almost totally destroyed by the Chinese ... What little is left in Tibet must be protected and efforts must be made to restore the environment to its balanced state.[28]*

The environmental application of this model offers an insight to the basic character of the "specialness" representation: it is a view of Tibetans as an endangered species, or of Tibet as a threatened habitat. As the American Buddhist scholar Robert Thurman described it, "the Tibetans are the baby seals of the human rights movement." [29] All the representations of Tibet as special share this sense of an unindividuated collectivity or zone that is unique and at risk. This is again important in a political analysis of these representations because it reproduces the colonializing type of relation between the writer and the subject that can be seen in literary texts of the romanticizing type, and has disabling implications similar to those generated by the image of the rape victim.

It is also a reminder that in many ways the models presented by Chinese and Western political texts are very similar: the phrase "Tibet's unique natural environment," for example, is standard in Chinese official texts. [30] The models underlying this idea of specialness differ in the same ways as the choices of terminology and image—the Chinese official conception sees the uniqueness as backwardness that needs to be advanced or educated through the process of social evolution; the Western conception seems to view it as something quaint or special that needs to be preserved or returned to an earlier condition. At a basic level the differences between the Western and Chinese political representations are small and, as we shall see, the two models are converging in both image and import, with all the indications of political rapprochement that this implies. The Chinese and Western views of Tibet as virginal and as special mainly differ, therefore, in whether the imagined inexperienced Tibet or Tibetan is regarded as a barbarian or as an innocent, as requiring civilizing or as needing protection and preservation.

But there is a point when representations have to be judged not morally by their closeness to some perceived reality or to a code of ethics or principles, but by the political message they are designed to convey and by the benefits they offer to those who buy into their imagery. One of the difficulties in the Western representations of Tibet as a victim is that if they were ever actualized, the offer they hold for their adherents is the restoration of pride, support for a nationalist ideal, and a return to a *status quo ante*; since these are essentially symbolic or psychological conditions, the sustainers of these representations do not have the power to enforce or actualize their texts. The offer implicit in China's representation of Tibet is that China will provide the material accoutrements of what it defines as civilization or modernity, a promise that it has the ability to carry out; to some extent it has already done so. Intellectually and politically this representation seems therefore to be more practicable and, in real-world terms, more coherent than the Western offer. Nevertheless, as we shall see, some Tibetans have chosen to encourage the Western offer, apparently because they see it as useful in their efforts to realize their own visions of a desirable future.

## Human Rights

There is nothing inherent or inevitable about the decision to view Tibet as a zone of violated specialness or virginity. The Western alliance that re-possessed Kuwait in 1990 never felt it necessary, for example, to argue that the Kuwaiti Sheikh was a man of extraordinary virtue, or that Kuwaiti culture was of exemplary quality; in fact, it was often noted that the Kuwaiti regime was implicated in quite extensive human rights abuses. In theory, Western politicians could have described Tibet as an invaded independent state, as they did with Kuwait, but although many activists and some individual politicians in the West believe that Tibet was independent when the Chinese troops arrived, that representation rarely appears in parliamentary statements (and certainly in no governmental statements) in the last 20 years, apart from the US Congressional Resolution of May 1991 and its various restatements within the US Congress; [31]

even the Indonesian concession of independence to East Timor in 1999 provoked few comparisons with Tibet. Of course, this reticence is partly the result of *real-politik* considerations by the politicians: few would want to provoke a serious confrontation with China. But it may also be significant that the representation of Tibet as an invaded nation lacks the cachet of uniqueness offered by the model of violated specialness: since some 180 other political entities are independent nation-states, there is nothing unique about being one. Neither can this notion be easily phrased so as to represent a condition of violated virginity, unless one were to ignore (as is usually done) the fact that Tibet had been invaded several times in the past, by the Chinese, British, Nepalese and Ladakhis. An invaded Tibet might merit sympathy in that a universal principle of international law has been abused, but it might not serve so many years after the event to command public attention and interest.

The same observation could be made about the decision not to represent Tibet as a colony entitled to decolonization.[32] If such a model had been developed, it would also have been based on the violation of a universally accepted legal principle, but its appeal would have been through its collegiality with other colonized peoples rather than through its uniqueness. This representation has been in effect abandoned or ignored by Western politicians as far as Tibet is concerned, despite recent efforts by Tibetan leaders to introduce it.[33] This suggests that the perception of politics itself had changed among those Tibetan leaders and others who at least in the 1980s promoted the imagery of violated specialness: instead of seeing politics as the effort to attract support from political institutions and their leaders by using the specialist vocabulary of that alliance to argue common purpose and mutual interest, they handled their international relations politics as a form of public relations—that is, as an endeavor to attract popular support through emotions such as sympathy or outrage.[34] These exile leaders, having realized in the mid-1980s that foreign governments had no strategic or political interest in raising the Tibet issue, decided instead to pressurize them by mobilizing popular support among their constituents. The colonial concept, however, offered none of the easily communicable attractiveness of the vivid imaginary worlds conjured up by the models of specialness and violation. In any case the prominent use of white intermediaries by Tibetans to present their case would have been regarded by many third world politicians as in itself a form of colonialism and as contradicting any claim made on that basis. The Tibetan exiles instead turned for support to former colonizers rather than to the formerly colonized, and chose public relations rather than political alliance as its form of politics. As I suggested earlier, the Tibet issue in the international domain is thus not really a political debate, since it does not address the political interests of other social forces; it is more an attempt to achieve political effects by engaging people in a shared image or representation.

The presentation of Tibet as violated specialness involved another choice: to which body of primordial principles should it appeal in order to locate or legitimize its perception of these incidents as violations? The Chinese authorities, who also saw Tibet as a site of violation, had appealed to various sets of general principles—to notions of statehood and territory when deploring imperialist interference in Chinese territory before 1950, to the unvarying precedents of history when dismissing claims to independence, to Marxist laws when defining the traditional Tibetan system of governance as a form of class oppression, and to the principles of social evolution or advancing civilization when explaining the need for Chinese intervention in Tibetan social structure. Increasingly—and this may be the most significant challenge to Tibetan political strategies in the West—Western politicians are starting to use this last model as their basis also for constructing an image of the situation in Tibet. But the dominant appeal in Western political rhetoric about Tibet remains that to the principles of human rights. It is in this choice that, perhaps, the influence of the exile Tibetan leadership can be seen most clearly.

The rhetoric of human rights has a long history, but as an active tool of policy in international relations it is a fairly recent device. There was a period after the First World War when Wilsonian assertions about the right of self-determination led eventually to the wide acceptance of the collective right to decolonization, but individual human rights did not emerge as a policy instrument until the Carter presidency, when they were used to attack the Soviet Union by focusing on its treatment of Jewish dissidents. However, even before the end of the Cold War the principle was being widely applied in the media and by politicians to other situations, and in early 1987 Roberta Cohen, formerly Carter's adviser on human rights, called for the principle to be applied to relations with the PRC.[35] At about the same time the exile leaders in Dharamsala completed their plans for the Dalai Lama to give political speeches abroad in order to place international pressure on the Chinese to end abuses in Tibet.

There was a major representational aspect to this decision: choices had to be made, consciously or not about what was to be understood not just by the terms violation or abuse, but also by much more loaded words: international, Chinese, Tibet, people and rights. As I understand it, it was at this time that it was decided that the main principle to which the Dalai Lama would appeal in his foreign speeches would be the principle of human rights; if so, the Tibetans could be seen as ahead of, rather than responding to Western representations of Tibet, for whom the human rights model became dominant after the October 1987 demonstrations in Lhasa. The exile leadership also decided, as much through practical limitations as through considered strategy, that the notion "international" was to be understood as contiguous with Western. That mis/representation of the international community was to have extensive implications for the effectiveness of this strategy, since it meant that the Tibet issue would be identified with Western interests, and would attract little support from developing countries.[36] Whatever the reasons, in the summer of 1987 the Dalai Lama began a series of speeches mainly in Western countries, in which he invoked the language of threatened and violated specialness and called for support for Tibet on the grounds of human rights.

## Weaknesses in the Human Rights Approach: The Problem of Evidence

Many of the assertions behind these presentations of the Tibetan situation are problematic, even in the restrained forms in which they appeared in most parliamentary resolutions and yet more so in governmental statements. Claims that Tibetan resistance to the Chinese has always been non-violent, for example, have been undermined by the publication of accounts of the guerilla movement. The idea that Tibet has a unique culture overlooks the Tibetan cultural world beyond political Tibet, wherever that is located, as well as a widely held view that culture is hybrid and constantly evolving; the notion of a wholly Buddhist society ignores its Bon and Muslim elements, as well as a probable atheist-Communist sector. The contradictions within the environmental view have been exposed by Toni Huber in his work.[37]

Nevertheless in some ways the claims to specialness provided an extraordinarily effective and sustained political vehicle for the Tibetan leadership: over a dozen or so years the Dalai Lama was able to visit 40 countries on some 170 occasions, always amidst extensive publicity, and often, despite strong Chinese objections and Western reluctance, meeting the political leaders of those countries as well. The human rights approach has also shown evident advantages, particularly in that it has attracted wide media attention and public sympathy, and in that it allowed access to the UN through its Commission on Human Rights: for the planners in Dharamsala the deployment of this approach was a strategic success of a high order. But it also included gradual disadvantages that were not at first apparent. Some of these can be seen by examining the role of evidence in appeals to principles of human rights.

The notion of human rights being quasi-legal, arguments to this principle tend to require nourishment by evidence of one kind or another. The evidence presented by the Chinese side—unquestionable facts of history, statistics, and statements by officials—relied on its claims to authoritativeness. The Tibetan notion of evidence seems to have depended on a sense that the Chinese claims could be overwhelmed by appealing to authenticity, as demonstrated by the experienced truthfulness of eyewitness reports, especially those given by ordinary, previously unknown Tibetans.[38] The focus of the exile Tibetan effort turned from the exile community as a site of enduring "Tibetanness" to the internal community in Tibet as enduring victims of abuse, and newly arrived refugees, who from the late 1980s were crossing the mountains into Nepal at the rate of two thousand or more a year, were called upon to present testimonies of their personal experiences at international fora. Much of the force of Tibetan exile presentations during this period derived from the idea that the authentic voice of ordinary Tibetans was being heard.[39]

The task of collecting evidence of violations in Tibet was taken up by a number of organizations and individuals, some with connections to the exile government or to the support movement, and others with commitments to journalism or human rights research.[40] A permanent post was established by the Tibetan exile government on the margins of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, full time debriefing operations were set up either by the exiles or by Western monitoring groups at reception

centers for refugees arriving in Kathmandu and Dharamsala, and numerous organizations and individuals travelled to conduct their own interviews with these witnesses, or to visit Tibet to authenticate their perceptions. All of this mirrored to some extent the process that the Tibetans had pursued in 1959 with their presentations to the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), a process that had been deeply tarnished by the ICJ's involvement in the Cold War politics of the time.[41] This time, however, the appeal was to the supposedly ideology-free canon of human rights, rather than to a discredited principle of opposing Communism.

Another difference from earlier efforts was that this time the main vehicle for propagating the information was the liberal media: Tibet had become a cross-party or centrist issue in Western Europe and North America and was no longer confined to the conservative end of the political spectrum. Furthermore, much of the evidence this time was coming from Westerners who had been allowed into Tibet when it was opened to tourism after 1979, many of them journalists, and there is no doubt that Western governments and the media were more ready to give credence to information gathered by Westerners than to the same information gathered by refugees.

A number of difficulties emerged with the spread of this human rights evidentiary approach. Firstly, the evidence was presented by some politicians or activists in ways that went beyond the normal conventions of quasi-legal evidence, particularly in the case of generalizations based on necessarily partial data. Mainstream journalists and human rights organizations rely on what one might call a notion of reasonable extrapolation, whereby a piece of evidence or testimony is cited as indicative of a number of similar but thus far undocumented incidents only if it can survive various tests of probability. These include such questions as whether the incident was feasible in practical terms, whether it could have achieved any reasonable purpose for the alleged perpetrators, whether the government in its published materials had ever indicated it even abstrusely, whether the evidence was first- rather than second-hand, whether the language of the evidence was neutral or emotive, and so on. In theory, evidence of abuses should be cited as indicative of a policy of human rights abuses only if it met these criteria.

What happened in a number of cases, however, was that certain kinds of evidence—those with particular emotive or ideological appeal to some sectors of the political spectrum—were re-presented as indicating a far wider extent of abuse than could “reasonably” be claimed. This form of representation (or re-representation), which I call “totalization,” attempts to maximize rhetorical effect by applying partial observation or information to an entire group or situation.

This totalizing tendency appeared most prominently in discussions of the issue of forced abortions among Tibetan women, where occasional or unclear reports of the practice were presented as if the incidents were rampant throughout Tibet.[42] This in turn led to the re-emergence in some Tibet-related political discourse in the West of the term “genocide,” apparently on the assumption that the birth control policy was intended to wipe out Tibetans.[43] The allegation was unsustainable, since evidence of a forced sterilization policy in Tibet was still inconclusive, such a policy would not have eradicated the Tibetan people (the abortions or sterilizations took place only after a certain number of births), and the much stricter policy applied to the Chinese people has come nowhere near to wiping them out. Claims of genocide could hardly be sustained by pointing to other forms of killings, since after 1990 the Chinese authorities had ended the shoot-to-kill policy applied to demonstrators in the streets from 1987-89 (though it has continued for prison protests), and since 1989, apart from within prisons, no deaths or executions for political actions had been reported from Tibet at all.[44] The term therefore in general disappeared from serious Western and exile discourse, to be replaced by the more measured but rather unclear term preferred by the Dalai Lama, namely “cultural genocide,” a notion that retained the drama of the earlier phrase without the gross inaccuracy. This term was then in turn applied in a totalized way[45] with the result that in his speeches the Dalai Lama soon found it necessary to qualify even this phrase by the remark “whether intentional or not,” since there was no evidence of a deliberate policy to wipe out Tibetan culture (though there was powerful evidence of restrictions placed on it). But it was too late: the term had become in its unqualified form a stable element of Western political discourse about Tibet, especially in more conservative political circles.

The forced abortion claims, in the totalized form that they assumed in some quarters, had another inherent weakness: they provoked independent scholars, obliged by academic conventions to contest evident inaccuracies, to disprove the claims. This was childishly easy to do when campaigners had

described abuses as occurring systematically throughout Tibet. Thus when two leading scholars published data on increasing family sizes in the community where they had worked in Central Tibet, allegations of forced birth control became unsustainable in their overstated form and even more measured claims were seen as suspect.[46]

The totalization trend had another consequence: it encouraged politicians with more extreme views to take up the Tibet issue. Thus, for example, the Tibet issue became rapidly more prominent on the agenda of politicians with ideological commitments to ending birth control. A similar process occurred with the religious issue: it was taken up by conservative politicians with a commitment to oppose religious suppression, particularly as it related to attacks on Christian evangelism. Chinese officials had significantly increased controls and harassment of religious practitioners in Tibet after 1994, but even so suppression of religion was selective and specific to certain locations and practices. Thus, inflated accounts of religious suppression could easily be refuted by a casual visitor to Tibet on the grounds that they had seen pilgrims at prayer in prominent temples.[47] The decision to represent Tibet in terms of its "specialness," a choice made in part because the image was ideologically mild and intangible, yet imaginatively vivid and dramatic, had thus led to a drift toward the right and towards easy refutation.

This was problematic for the Tibetan exiles and the Tibet lobby groups, especially because it coincided with the re-emergence of strong, socially conservative political parties in Europe and in the US, heightened by the disintegration of the Soviet bloc after 1989. It was an important strategic principle for the exile Tibetan leadership to try to prevent the Tibet issue from being isolated at one extreme of the political spectrum if it was to avoid a repeat of the collapse suffered by the Tibet question in the late 1960s, when its perception as an anti-communist movement had led to the discrediting of the evidentiary claims made by Tibetans,[48] as well as to the collapse of governmental support after the rapprochement that followed the meeting between Nixon and Mao in 1971. It had been difficult, therefore, for exile Tibetan leaders to capture a broad base of support in the West.

There had been Tibet support groups of a kind in Europe and elsewhere since 1959, but these had been conservative in character and strategy, working within political élites, and gradually becoming organizations focused on refugee relief work as they lost active support after 1971 from governments and even from right wing politicians. The great achievement, therefore, of the exiles' 1987 initiative was that, perhaps for the first time, the Tibetan issue became acceptable to center-leftists as well as to more conservative political sectors who had traditionally given it their support. The groups founded in 1987 or afterwards represented the involvement in the issue of young, politically astute people from the liberal areas of the political spectrum, usually from the professional classes, who had a natural alliance with the media as well as with some sectors of the "New Age" movements in the West, which until then had been largely resistant to any political mobilization. The romantic representation of Tibet as a site of religious excellence or as a bastion of anti-communist resistance had been deeply alienating to this professionalized, left-of-center sector of Western society, just as it was to most professional politicians of that era and, most significantly, to the media. It was the representation of Tibet as a "specialized" site of human rights violations which seems to have made the issue palatable to a broad, cross-party community.[49]

In particular, the exiles' strategy of asking the Dalai Lama to travel abroad and to speak there on political issues had a perhaps unexpected bonus: it led to the reluctance or rumored refusal of Western governments to allow entry to the Dalai Lama on his round of tours. This created a mobilizing issue for those to whom the notion of universal human rights was of growing importance, and for whom the idea of a Western democratic government accepting Chinese dictates about whom it should meet was unacceptable.[50] Reports of such refusals and the controversies they provoked appeared not on the foreign pages but on the more influential domestic news pages of Western newspapers, and involved opposition parties as well as lobby groups in accusing a sitting government of complicity with Chinese intolerance—a representation that was hard for any democratic government to refute so long as it refused access to the Tibetan leader. Thus the Tibetans' 1987 initiative had created a cross-party support base and had also moved the Tibet issue from the foreign agenda to the much more potent domestic agenda of many Western countries.[51] The Dalai Lama's presence at the fringes of the UN conferences in Brazil and Vienna in 1992 and 1993 lifted these issues of Western complicity onto a world stage.

This achievement in the late 1980s was put at risk by the drift of the human rights representation of Tibet

towards overstatement, its attractiveness to far right conservatives, and its vulnerability to apparent contradiction. Thus, when a public dispute emerged in Australia in 1999 over a typical allegation about violations in Tibet, it was no longer a marginal pro-Chinese politician who was defending Beijing's record in Tibet but a senior member of the ruling party.[52] The tendency to representational distortion within the Tibet issue had, it seemed, alienated even centrist politicians.

## Totalitarianism and Double Orientalism

An additional problem with the representation of Tibet as a site of human rights abuses was that in many cases it tended to become vulnerable because of what we might call "double orientalism"—the tendency to view the Chinese system of governance and society as deeply alien because it is "Eastern" or Asian, coupled with the tendency to view it as deeply alien because it is Communist and totalitarian. Essentialist constructions of this kind rendered ineffective some of the evidence that was integral to the human rights case made about Tibet from the 1980s onwards. For example, a Westerner who imagines "the Chinese," "the Chinese Communists" or "totalitarianism" to be ruthlessly efficient or monolithic in thought and operation, tends to assume that implementation of a policy will be uniform and comprehensive. However, because in China the press is controlled by the government, and because significant challenges to the state's authority are not allowed, a very wide range of views, compliance, and policy implementation is tolerated in areas that are considered insignificant or that the state does not have the resources to control—exactly the opposite of what might be envisaged as characteristic of a totalitarian system. Another, perhaps (to outsiders) unexpected consequence of this system is that written orders and instructions are almost always vague and ambiguous, because no official wants to be held responsible in the event of a later reversal or reinterpretation of the policy. One therefore finds within China and Tibet extremely wide variations, from township to township, of the extent and form in which any policy is implemented, and very little explicit written evidence that the policy exists. Thus even a reasonable claim that a certain policy has been implemented in Tibet or China is readily susceptible to contradiction by any visitor or researcher, since it might well have been implemented in one village but not in another. Claims of human rights abuses are thus frequently refuted because of the structural inadequacies within the conception they assume of the Chinese state.

There was another cluster of problems within the notion of human rights itself. That notion implied primordiality—the presumption that human rights principles have existed since an unspecified time in the remote past. In fact, a body of written, internationally accepted legislation on human rights has emerged only in the last century, but the notion, at least when used to mobilize popular support, is often presented in terms of "natural law," implying that these rights are immanent and pre-existing, although strictly speaking they are imaginary or conventional. When the most powerful proponents of this view—usually Western governments—insist on the absolute correctness of their interpretations, it provokes other parties to see these absolutist readings of what is a recent, multi-authored text as a challenge to their political authority. The debates over "Asian values" and "non-interference in internal affairs" were partly responses to this conflict, but they were rapidly discarded by the Chinese (to the discomfort of their less adaptive allies)[53] and replaced by the accusation that Western powers were using human rights to bully developing countries. The use by the West of the human rights model for Tibet thus enabled China, Malaysia, India and other countries to present the Tibet issue as a device to promote Western political domination. The evident fact that the Dalai Lama's team had directed all his efforts towards Western countries gave the Chinese authorities greater opportunity to represent the Tibet issue in this light. The human rights version of the Tibet issue was thus rapidly locked into larger debates of this kind, and to some extent became marginalized as post-Cold War tension increased during the 1990s between developing countries and Western powers.[54]

In early 1994 the US reversed its position on China's trading status and ended attempts to link that status to human rights conditions, and essentially the role of human rights as a tool of leverage in international relations collapsed, at least in relation to China. It was replaced by the notion of "constructive engagement," which meant that countries met in private once or twice a year to discuss human rights issues, a practice that has not been shown to yield practical results.[55] At least at a superficial view, the human rights strategy pursued by the Tibetan exiles since 1987 had been neutralized and required adaptation.

Two further complications arose from the choice of the human rights-related representation in the political domain. One of these is related to the fact that this approach is ideologically indistinct—all par<sup>Foregro</sup> in the political process, including those in China, since the 1980s express support for the principle of human rights, which is why it had seemed a good choice as a basis for a representation of Tibet's political conditions and needs. However, this absence of ideological precision renders the human rights approach relatively impotent as a political tool. It can define perpetrators in particular instances of abuse, and even in patterns of abuse, but it cannot invoke a politically coherent description of a state's policies, especially since almost all states posture to occupy the same ground within this discourse. Concepts like dictatorship, colonial power and empire describe actual forms of the exercise of power rather than vaguely defined moral improprieties; as tools of criticism they address the structural bases of a wide swath of policies and outcomes, and invoke deep-seated responses among political activists and leaders as a result. The human rights approach, by contrast, addresses moral aberrations and ends up "policing" them rather than "struggling" for a cause. This approach leads to a further difficulty: as a largely moral strategy, it lends itself to a blurring of distinctions between word and deed. This is reflected in a typical confusion about the distinction between arms of government in the Western system. Both legislative and executive arms of Western governments have expressed support for the human rights principles invoked in Tibetan cases since 1987, but most of these statements were legislative, not executive, and thus were rarely binding on governments; executive statements were naturally much weaker.[56] In general, the spate of statements about the importance of ending human rights abuses in Tibet which emerged from parliaments and governments during the late 1980s and the 1990s gave the impression that much was being accomplished in the political domain, whilst in fact the activity was almost entirely rhetorical in nature.

It is in fact a particular complication of human rights discourse that, since governments and politicians will interpret and implement their support for human rights principles in very different ways, it becomes very difficult to distinguish verbal from actual support. The "imaginary" character of the notion of human rights in itself encourages this scope for variant interpretations, and this becomes especially apparent in terms of the mechanisms that are offered as remedies. Essentially, putting aside the option of economic sanctions, which the exile Tibetan leaders themselves decided should not be called for, human rights remedies are essentially rhetorical—they lack any realistic possibility of enforcement and are limited basically to a government, parliamentary, UN or NGO official writing to the Chinese authorities and requesting, proposing or demanding a remedy. The basic stratagem, therefore, is one of threatening to cause embarrassment. Before 1994 there was an implication of real economic and political consequences if the abuses were not corrected, mainly because of America's threats until that year to withhold the renewal of China's trading privileges. Indeed, until that time these threats were to some extent effective.[57] But the larger problem, apart from the effectiveness, was that it became rapidly impossible to tell if a Western government or politician was threatening to embarrass China in order to impress his or her domestic constituency, while indicating to China or assuming that the threat of embarrassment would be understood by Beijing to be empty rhetoric.[58]

The other, and perhaps the most serious, complication that arose as a result of this approach was that the success of the human rights model appears to have been achieved at the expense of concerns much more central for the Tibetans, such as the question of Tibet's status. Western governments reluctant to antagonize Beijing expressed support for human rights whilst at that same time, as a *quid pro quo* to mollify Beijing, they scaled down or discarded their support for more substantive issues like Tibetan political or territorial claims.[59] These complications were not ignored by the Tibetan exiles and their advisers, who later made rather strenuous efforts to replace them with another, more suitable representation.[60]

Western governments, seeking the form of representation that would least antagonize China, had found that the models of specialness offered by pro-Tibet politicians were so lacking in political definition and specificity that they could be easily appropriated by governments to suit their own purposes—in other words, they offered a language that could be used ambiguously so that the domestic audience would see it as criticizing China while Chinese officials might be persuaded that the criticisms were sufficiently mild so as not to be threatening to fundamental concerns. They thus began from the early 1990s to invest strongly in a diluted version of the representation of Tibet as a special but imperiled culture, and to refer to "distinctive cultural, religious and ethnic" features of "the Tibetan people" which were at risk, often

mentioning environmental issues as well. They avoided terms referring to total destruction, nationhood<sup>d</sup> territory or status. Foregro

Although the language used resembles the model of “violated specialness” found in Tibetan, journalistic, and some parliamentary statements, the underlying model to which governmental statements about endangered forms of Tibetanness are referring is not necessarily one of a unique or special civilization that must be defended: it is equally likely to be a model of community relations such as pertains within most Western countries when they consider their domestic minorities or indigenous peoples. The words used in both models—protecting cultural, religious and ethnic identity, and so on—may be indistinguishable, but the contexts may indicate very different connotations. The underlying model emerging in government statements—of perceiving Tibetans as having a “community” identity rather than a “national” identity—had been openly expressed by writers such as Neville Maxwell, who had argued strongly during the 1980s for the concept of “the multi-national state,” which defined countries like China or India as post-colonial and pluralist variants of the nation-state and asserted that friction between ethnic groups within these states was normal and of purely local concern. Some US scholars have similarly presented the Tibetan situation as analogous to the condition of the black community in the US and noted that racial tension continues in America even after many decades of attempts to resolve it. In these representations the Tibetan nation is being reconstructed as a community or as an ethnic group.

These approaches, which de-nationalize and de-territorialize the issue, offer governments a non-confrontational way to deal with the Tibet issue.[61] Since China had represented itself from about 1993 as a state that fully accepted the universality of human rights—apparently because it had become clear that Western governments no longer intended to use human rights as a tool of policy rather than rhetoric—and since, as we have seen, it anyway regarded Tibetan and other minority cultures as distinctive and in need of assistance for their preservation, the gap between Chinese and Western governmental positions was narrowing. The community relations model and the theory of social evolution have much in common, and it was no coincidence that at about this time in China the word “ethnic” began to be widely used instead of “nationality” in official translations of the term *minzu* to describe Tibetans and other minority groups.

The success of the human rights violation model might thus be said to have been something of a mixed blessing for the Tibetan exile leaders who had planned it. However, it is clear now that they and their advisers had always envisaged a gradualist approach in which they would use this model to engage wide, cross-party Western support, and would then progress to other, more complex political issues or models. But they were caught unawares by the speed with which the human rights representation became successful and firmly established: they underestimated the power of the construction.[62] In practice, they were partially trapped by the success of the initial representation they generated, which was far more attractive to their most influential audience than other, more politicized, models to which they might have wanted to progress. In fact, given that the essence of a representation is that its force derives not from logic but from a kind of primordial shared conviction, supplemented by evidence of various kinds, it could be argued that it would always have been very difficult to shift people from one effective shared representation to another. This is, however, easy to say with the advantage of hindsight and may have been unimaginable in meetings in Dharamsala before there were any signs of significant Western interest in the Tibetan political project.

## “Misrepresentation Representations” and Other Models

The human rights model was not the only way in which the Tibet issue was represented in the international community. In India especially there was much interest in the representation of Tibet as a site of regional military threat, because of the reported placing of nuclear missiles on the Tibetan plateau, and because of recollections of the 1962 Sino-Indian war and the 1987 military clash over the siting of the Indo-Tibetan border, an issue still not resolved.[63] The pre-eminent Tibetan political scientist Dawa Norbu wrote that only if this representation were taken up would the Tibet issue ever be capable of resolution,[64] but despite attempts to introduce it elsewhere,[65] this approach appears in public political discourse mainly in India, where it appears to be confined chiefly to sections of the military and supporters of the Bharatiya Janata Party (the BJP). Briefly, in 1997, just after the BJP came to rule and

declared India a nuclear power, this representation of Tibet as a zone of major strategic concern shifted dramatically from the legislative and media sectors to the government, when George Fernandes, then India's Minister of Defense, made a statement that China was India's main source of threat;[66] the first time in recent years that the Indian Government had taken a pro-active position on the Tibet-China issue. The statement led to an immediate downturn in relations with China, and had to be withdrawn; but the incident showed the potential force of representing Tibet as a zone of military or geo-strategic significance.

Since the early 1990s two other, inter-linked representations have emerged that have been effective in public discourse, particularly in Western cultures, and that have come to dominate foreign journalistic discussions of Tibet so that in time they are likely to influence foreign political accounts also. One of these is the depiction of Tibet as a site of misrepresentation. The idea that Tibet is not really a mystical or romantic place re-emerged as the standard journalistic comment on Tibet in the early 1990s, not long after the publication of Peter Bishop's book, *The Myth of Shangri-La*. His description of Western fabulizing about Tibet was not entirely new, since even in the 1970s, if not earlier, scholars had criticized mystical depictions of Tibet.[67] But it led in the last decade to a great proportion of foreign journalistic reports about Tibet being based on the revelation that Tibet was not utopia. "Clinton to Find no Shangri-La on Tibet," Reuters had announced in June 1998; "The Shangri-La That Never Was," declared a headline in the *New York Times* the following week.[68]

Such comments are in fact more a rhetorical device than a discussion about Tibet. They rely on the expression of surprise at something already known to be untrue, rather like publishing an exposé revealing that Camelot never existed, and depend on the unproven supposition that there exists a large and significant cohort of readers who conceptualize Tibet as a paradise; they are linked usually to the presumption that the writer has superior knowledge, acquired typically by visiting Tibet. Both these forms of "revelatory" device—one of exposing the truth to an illiterate or misreading audience, and the other of exposing the truth as a result of empirical knowledge—are found in academic writing about Tibet as well as in statements by journalists and politicians.[69]

This "misrepresentation representation" thus depends on the writer claiming the authority to reveal their higher knowledge, and, accordingly, tends to communicate the perceptiveness of the author rather than a perception of a place or a people. There is no political specificity about the representation of Tibet as a site of misrepresentations: writers at either end of the political spectrum find this model equally appropriate to their needs and can use it as part of their own projects.

A second category of texts within this "misrepresentation" group challenged not only the Shangri-La view of Tibet, but also the notion of violation. These writers also tended to rely on the authority they acquired from the performance of a visit, as a result of which they reported that there was little significant evidence of major human rights violations or of popular discontent,[70] although in some cases the abuses they refuted had been alleged only in totalizing discourse, and, never having been defined with any precision, had had only a ghost-like presence in the debate. Out of this dialectical negotiation of misrepresentations there has emerged a growing and important body of writing. When writers of this school do describe a Tibet, rather than a debate, the model that is most often used is that of the spreading of modernity—a society changing under the influence of technology, modernization, communications, and globalized culture (in fact, the Tibet that is described by this model is almost entirely urban, as if the 88% of Tibetans who live in the countryside inhabit some other place). Again, this is a perception that writers of both political wings find themselves able to use: since the 1979 reforms, and especially since Deng Xiaoping called for a commitment to rapid marketization of the economy in 1992, the principal Chinese rhetoric about Tibet has also become a rhetoric about modernity:

*We are engaged in the great undertaking of bringing a new, prosperous socialist Tibet into a glorious twenty-first century ... A modernization blueprint of unequalled magnificence will unfold before 2.3 million people of all ethnic groups.[71]*

The proposition that Chinese rule provides modernization has now replaced liberation from feudal oppression as the central legitimation device for the Chinese state and the Communist Party in Tibet; the

new theme recurs in almost all political texts that explain the Chinese role in Tibetan lives and futures. This means, of course, that there are two or more interpretations of the same modernization, of the same fax machines, mobile phones, metalled roads, computer links and multi-storied asymmetrical blocks with tinted glass and chrome exteriors which line the streets of Tibetan towns: to the Chinese state, these facets of modernization represent progress, while to some foreign writers and observers they represent modernization as encroachment, depravity, or the erosion of distinctiveness and tradition. Some of these writers raised the question as to how modernization should be considered,[72] and recognized that interpreting this process was problematic. In more popular writings, however, it is often portrayed unquestioningly as a threat to cultural survival:

*Li Wong stretches her legs invitingly towards the tourists. "Hello, come in," whispers the Chinese prostitute who works in one of the street brothels of Lhasa that surround the Potala palace, once the seat of the Dalai Lama and one of the holiest places of Tibetan Buddhism.[73]*

reported a German Press Agency in 1994. To writers of this school, modernization is represented as an attack on Tibetan innocence by Chinese predators, in what appears to be another variation on the notion of Tibet as sexually violated.[74]

Another version of this view, perhaps the most pervasive, describes immigrant entrepreneurs—usually envisaged primarily as Chinese men rather than Chinese prostitutes—as the new form of threat to the vulnerable culture; this view is central to the picture presented by the Dalai Lama and his officials and has wide currency in the political as well as the journalistic domains, where it is often linked directly to threats to wipe out Tibetan culture.[75] It is particularly important because it is often adopted by Western governments as well as parliamentarians, albeit in more restrained terms. Thus the 1996 report of the US Department of State on human rights noted that

*ethnic Han and Hui immigrants from other parts of China, encouraged by government policies and new opportunities are competing with—and in some cases displacing—Tibetan enterprises and labor ... rapid and ecologically inappropriate growth has also disrupted traditional living patterns and thereby threatened traditional Tibetan culture. [76]*

Modernization, therefore, is a theme that, like other representations, can be appropriated for almost any political need with very little change of language, even more readily than human rights discourse. Thus the spectrum of foreign readings of modernization is wide—it includes interpreting it as a Chinese extermination plot, as a developmental consequence of globalization that exists irrespective of "the Chinese" and their policies, and as the process of beneficial social evolution. It therefore has the inherent ambiguity of an image, in that it can be proposed with one meaning while it is used politically in another, allowing a government to present a model of Tibet intended to be read by its domestic audience as concern for the threat to traditional culture, and by Chinese diplomats as sympathy for the difficulties of bringing a backward society into the modern world.

It is, in fact, inaccurate to consider the modernization process in Tibet as a value-neutral device by Chinese policy makers designed to advance living standards. Wang Lixiong, for example, although sometimes regarded as a critic of Chinese state policy, describes it quite openly in his influential paper on Tibet as a policy mechanism for countering religion and nationalism in Tibet:

*A market economy has certainly helped to clear up the religion problem, particularly among the urban Tibetans who have gotten more deeply involved in market actions, where the religious mind set is being steadily downplayed, and the people are starting to take an interest in worldly enjoyment.[77]*

The modernization theme is therefore problematic for the Tibetan exile project: it neither accentuates the specialness of Tibet nor provides a language that identifies the policy objectives of Western governments

and politicians if and when they take up this approach. Like human rights discourse, representations developed around this theme can be evocative as rallying calls within the "public relations" mode of political discourse (for example, by saying that the survival of Tibetan culture is threatened) but ambiguous and deceptive as builders of practical political positions and collective interests beyond the superficial level. It offers a shared linguistic framework within which Chinese and non-Chinese political forces can conceal their differences and, by exploiting its ambiguities, find themselves within what in effect an alliance in diminishing or neutralizing the claims of Tibetan nationalists. Foregro

## The Dalai Lama as Tibet

There have been a number of attempts to circulate counter-representations within the contemporary discussion of Tibet, most of them attacks on the personal credibility of the Dalai Lama. In 1995 the Chinese authorities sought to link him both to the Asahara cult in Japan[78] and, following revelations concerning Heinrich Harrer's past, to the Nazi Party.[79] Chinese writers also accused the Dalai Lama or his advisers of planning assassinations, bombings and sabotage in Tibet,[80] as well as alleging that he wished to restore the "feudal-theocratic system." Western counter-representations focused more on the notion that the Dalai Lama's authority was in doubt because of his association with filmstars,[81] disputes among Tibetans over the use of armed resistance,[82] or his ban of the sectarian protector-deity Dorje Shugden.[83] These negative images did not make any significant impact on the political texts produced by Western nations, or from countries with special connections to Tibet like India, Mongolia, Taiwan and Japan, but in the rest of the world, where one finds little reference to the idea of Tibet as special or of the Dalai Lama as worthy of respect, these counter-representations are more influential, a reminder that foreign support for the Tibet issue is highly localized. But the persistent Chinese representation of the Dalai Lama as an unreliable negotiating partner, whether it was believed or not, has nevertheless come to dominate the consideration of the Tibet issue for Western policy makers. This can be seen from the famous remark that the US President Bill Clinton found himself having to make to Jiang Zemin at the end of their press conference in Beijing in June 1998: "I have spent time with the Dalai Lama. I believe him to be an honest man and I believe that, if he has a conversation with President Jiang, they will like each other very much." [84] Clinton made no mention in this conversation of Tibet as such, or of its status, its political condition, popular demands, or even of the human rights situation there. In the Western political perception, judging by this crucial example, the Chinese representation of the issue had been rejected in content but accepted in form—the Sino-Tibetan conflict had come to revolve around the interpretation of the Dalai Lama as an individual.[85]

The inordinate success of the exiles' human rights initiative had thus led to the Dalai Lama being placed on the international agenda rather than Tibet, an outcome that the exile leader and his government had expressly sought to avoid. Tibet itself as an imagined community of some kind did assume a profile in the international press and in political statements, as we have seen, but by the end of the 1990s most political and governmental statements had come to focus largely on the role of the Dalai Lama as an object of negotiation.[86] I use the word object here because in these texts he is often referred as someone with whom the Chinese should converse, to use Clinton's word: there is little mention in foreign political and journalistic texts of what he or the Chinese should be talking about, or what the criteria for an acceptable resolution might be.[87] The notions of "dialogue" and "negotiation" have acquired in this discourse a kind of virtual quality, as if the act of a Chinese official speaking with the Dalai Lama would be a ritual performance that would constitute in itself a solution to the conflict.

In the political domain, especially in governmental documents, the dominant representation of the Tibetan issue in the late 1990s has thus become this representation of Tibet as the Dalai Lama. The elision of the leader with the nation runs deep within Tibetan tradition, as the Lama himself noted in his 1962 autobiography:

*I am a mortal being ... but [the Tibetans] believed the Dalai Lama represented Tibet and the Tibetan way of life, something dearer to them than anything else. They were convinced that if my body perished at the hands of the Chinese, the life of Tibet would also come to an end. [88]*

It is no mean achievement to have exported this perception of Tibet and the Dalai Lama as one into foreign discourse, because there is a constant tension between his role as a traveling teacher representing spirituality in general and his role as a representative of a country in crisis.[89] However, Western version of this personification has taken a more literal form. Just as his words are taken as those of the Tibetan people, so his personal history is seen as the story of an exiled, religious people,[90] even though 97% of Tibetans remain in Tibet and many may not be religious. Journalistic accounts of meetings with him tend to find meanings in the details of his body or attire, seeing his laugh as symbolic of the collective cheerfulness of the Tibetan race and his robes as representing their religiosity and modesty.[91] The dangers of this kind of emblematic reading can be seen with the Dalai Lama's shoes. Many accounts had written of the sturdiness of his "well-worn leather Oxfords"—they are read as indicating the modesty of the Tibetan character—until 1997, when the *Denver Post* noted that the Lama had changed to a more modern brand. The story was picked up by the Associated Press [92] and led two years later to a statement by the most powerful media figure of all, the news magnate Rupert Murdoch. Murdoch had no problem in regarding the Dalai Lama's footwear as politically significant: "I have heard cynics who say he's a very political old monk shuffling around in Gucci shoes," said Murdoch of the Tibetan leader, "[Tibet] was a pretty terrible old autocratic society out of the Middle Ages.... it was an authoritarian, medieval society without any basic services," he added.[93] In the hands of the man whom many would regard as the most influential user of political representations, the new shoes had been deployed to represent cunning and feudal restorationism.

The perception of the Dalai Lama as Tibet remains rooted and accepted, despite the insistence by Western governments (as opposed to parliaments) that he is the spiritual rather than the political leader of Tibet. But although for Tibetans religion and politics are, traditionally, combined, it is not clear that for Western readers the Tibet he embodies is a political Tibet; as I have suggested, he has been imported into a discourse that is more about an idea of specialness than about people with varying interests and demands, which I take to be a determining aspect of politics. There is clearly a political dimension to the perception of the Dalai Lama in Western political discourse; even the Chinese, rather helpfully from this perspective, call him a "political tramp." He is refused visas regularly in Asian and African countries because of what he represents politically. He is cited in all Western governmental appeals to the Chinese authorities concerning Tibet as the person with whom they should negotiate with regard to the future of Tibet. But it is not clear that this Tibet which he represents and whose future he should negotiate is a political Tibet with a defined territory and customs, or a highly complex society in transition with a wide range of sectors and interests, and a rapidly changing social environment. Does he represent perhaps the Tibetan people wherever they find themselves, including those in the eastern areas which Lhasa rarely ruled?[94] Or all the followers of Tibetan Buddhism, or perhaps those who constitute "Tibetan culture"? If so, are Tibetan Buddhists in Ladakh or Sikkim, Tibetan Christians in Leh, or Tibetan Muslims now living in Kuwait or the Middle East included in this notion?

These are the typical questions posed by representational analysts. But even if they are resolved, there is another weakness within this representation: it fails to convey within its imagery a sense of the process by which the Dalai Lama comes to represent his constituents. There is no allowance within this image for the existence of multiple voices, or for the mechanisms by which the Dalai Lama distills disparate interests and views, processes that are central to the modern concept of a representative leader.[95] The absence of hybridity in this image is thus, in terms of political credibility, a source of weakness. The trope of personification by which the Dalai Lama comes to represent a country and a people conveys for a Western audience a sense of mystery, theocracy and non-democracy, which are principles he expressly rejects.

This tension is reflected in criticism within the exile community. "It is unfortunate but equally true that the Dalai Lama in exile has tended to discourage the emergence of alternative leaders, unless officially approved by him," Dawa Norbu has written, "However, both in exile and inside Tibet, one observes the emergence of a modern educated class that is independent of Communist or lamaist domination. It is tragic that the Dalai Lama sees no role for such modern educated Tibetans in his vision of a future Tibet in association with China." [96] This statement could be contested—in what was one of the most interesting of all his political initiatives, the Dalai Lama had announced in 1992 that existing cadres in Tibet would retain their positions should he return[97]—but it conveys something of the local, internal cost of a collective representation which might be appealing to outsiders but in which leading members of that

collectivity cannot perceive significant inclusion of their role.

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The political weakness of the Western view of the Dalai Lama is reflected in foreign attitudes towards ministers of the Tibetan exile government. The Dalai Lama told *Time* magazine in 1997 that he would "love to delegate some responsibilities to his deputies" but "even if some of my Cabinet ministers wanted to give public talks, nobody would come." [98] Logically speaking, if the Dalai Lama is genuinely thought of as a political institution representing the interests of Tibetans, then his elected and appointed ministers would be treated as if they also represented those interests and in principle would be worth meeting, much as the delegation of Tibetan government ministers had been when they visited England in 1948—they were given an official, red-carpet welcome at Victoria Station and then driven to Buckingham Palace, despite strong Chinese objections. The current failure of Tibetan ministers to acquire representative significance in Western perceptions is due in part to the fact that their government is now in exile, but the political imagery now applied to the Dalai Lama anyway depicts him as a personal rather than a political construction, and it has failed to develop imagery inferring a process by which his status, knowledge or power can be delegated or transferred. For this or some similar reason, he seems to be disempowered in his dealings with Western politicians, as if he were a symbol rather than an agent. The writer Pico Iyer describes a telling remark made by the Dalai Lama in 1997, which perhaps reflects this liminal world to which he has been consigned, within the political domain but not truly of it:

*The single most difficult thing in his life, he admits, is "meeting with politicians. Realistically speaking, it's just symbolic. They cannot do much." [99]*

In other words, it could be said that the Dalai Lama is seen as representing the Tibetan people not in a political but in a literary sense, in much the same way that some romanticists saw the Himalayan landscape as representing the Tibetan people. Thus the Tibet he personifies in these political texts seems to be a visionary Tibet rather than a political, shifting, composite and hybrid Tibet constituted by disparate voices, which is how most "real" nations are conceived. In the final analysis, it would seem, the political imagery deployed in the effort to describe Tibet conspires against its admission into the community of nations, whether they be imaginary or not.

## Conclusion

Thus it seems that the difference between the literary and political envisionings of Tibet may, therefore, be very little. The various representations of Tibet in the political realm—as a site of brutalized innocence, as violated specialness, as an imperiled culture, or as a notion embodied in the person of the Dalai Lama—are all in a sense literary creations, sometimes noble, sometimes highly motivated, but all uniform imaginaries which are often devoid of a sense of political process or complexity, and without a space in which other, non-uniform voices may be heard and easily included.

They thus share with those various literary views of Tibet as a paradise, or of Tibet as a hell, a relation to their supposed subjects which is one that either omits most of them in the interest of uniformity, or that deprives them of agency and that treats them in the colonializing manner, as lesser, quaint, or predictable, or as victims or embodiments of an idea. As Rinchen Lhamo had pointed out some seventy-five years earlier, these disempowering images which originated from "a conventional statement about us put into vogue by travellers" in any case usually contradicted themselves. The current images, by depicting Tibetans in general as without agency, thus tend to weaken the strength of the claim that they are often invoked to support, the right of Tibetans to self-determination or independence. The appeal to human rights tends to drift towards overstatements that further deny variations and distinctions within the Tibetan situation, or it engenders in political statements an inability to distinguish between rhetorical and practical commitment: these are the typical inherent weaknesses of these models as political devices.

There is, however, a crucial difference from the view which Rinchen Lhamo proposed. The deployment of images of Tibet in Western political discourse since the mid-1980s does not appear to be derived purely from intervention by foreigners: they represent to a significant degree the agency of the Tibetan

leadership in Dharamsala, as well as that of other Tibetans, and indicate its strategic use of certain traditionally-based conceptual models of Tibet for political or media-related objectives which it regards as vital to Tibetan interests. In this respect it has been outstandingly successful, even though, as the leaders were probably aware at the time, the models perpetuated in-built implications of political incapacity. If, as now seems probable, exile Tibetan politicians believed that the limitations of the initial images they encouraged in the Western political domain would be offset by their ability in due course to replace them with more sophisticated models, events suggest that they may still be proven right. In other words, it appears that the Tibetan leadership perceived political representation in the West if not elsewhere as a process of continuous adaptation and negotiation in which Tibetans, both in the élite and in other social groups, attempt to adapt and re-shape the models that best express their needs or interests at the time. And indeed, within the two months since the first draft of this paper was prepared two major changes have already taken place in Dharamsala, the seat of the exile government: in February 2000 the Dalai Lama was re-enthroned as the leader of Tibet in a ceremony which, by re-staging the 1940 "gser khri mnga' gsol," (literally, the "enthronement on the golden throne"), re-constructed before the television cameras of the world the authority of the Dalai Lama as not merely spiritual or personal in its origin but as representing the Tibetan state.[100] In this model his virtue is secondary to the institutional authority invested in him by his office and his subjects: his personal attributes—his shoes, his smile, his beliefs—become less significant than his role as leader.

At the same time, by welcoming the arrival of the seventeenth Karmapa, the fourteen-year-old head of the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism who in January 2000 escaped to India from Tibet, the Dalai Lama initiated a discussion among Tibetans about a political decision which foreign experts and journalists had said was impossible because of the rigidity of Tibetan history, tradition and sectarianism: the possibility that the Dalai Lama's role could be passed on not by reincarnation as it has been since the seventeenth century, but by consensus or appointment to the head of another religious school. That discussion, even if still tentative and premature, is the most sophisticated response yet by Tibetans to the Chinese strategy of isolating the debate over Tibet to the person of the Dalai Lama, and to the tendency among Western politicians to do the same: it means to Tibetans that even if the Dalai Lama died, their community and their interests could still be represented and embodied without the risk of an interregnum, a phenomenon which had so plagued the earlier system, and on which China appears to have relied since the early 1990s. We can see from such glimpses the quiet, traditionally-rooted ways in which the Tibetan community is able to make difficult but creative, and sometimes rapid, shifts in its forms of self-imagining, just as it had done in the 1980s decision to seek international support, as it seeks to shape and adapt the institutional and national representations which its members wish to see held by both their own and other communities. ■

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## NOTES

[1] A version of this paper was presented at the conference "Representing Tibet" held at the University of Boulder, Colorado, in January 2000. I am grateful to the participants for their contributions to this paper, to Jeanne-Marie Gilbert for assistance with the editing, and to the East Asian Institute at Columbia University. My efforts in this paper are in some ways complementary to Meg McLagan's studies of the representation of Tibet in contemporary political movements in the West, where she too notes "how Tibetans engage Western discourses about Tibetanness in the process of constituting themselves in exile" (McLagan (1997), p. 89).

[2] Rinchen Lhamo (1926), pp. 95–96, cited in Tashi Tsering (1996), p. 3.

[3] Jamyang Norbu has written widely on the role of representation. "For years, the only way Tibetans could get a hearing in the world's capitals was to emphasize our spirituality and helplessness ...Tibetans who pick up rifles don't fit that romantic image we've built up in Westerners' heads," (cited in Salopek (1997)). See also Jamyang Norbu (1989) and Tsering Shakya (1991, 1993).

[4] Donald Lopez describes the western presentation of the Tibet issue as "a prison, in which Tibetan lamas in exile and their students are at once the inmates and the guards". He placed his discussion of exile Tibetan agency within a concept of mimesis or a "process of doubling," suggesting that the "Tibet that Tibetans in exile have come to appropriate and deploy in an effort to gain standing in exile" was to be seen "only as it was reflected in the elaborately framed mirror of Western fantasies about Tibet" (Lopez (1998), pp. 11, 13, 200). A discussion of Lopez's argument, with contributions by Germano, Shakya, Thurman and Lopez, is due to be published in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Volume 69, Issue 1 in March 2001. Vincanne Adams questioned contemporary Tibetans' "authenticity," describing many of them as "engaging in scripted simulations, becoming the sort of Tibetans desired by Chinese and Westerners by reproducing and enunciating the scripts of authentic Tibetanness produced by outsiders." Adams (1996), p. 536.

[5] This is perhaps indicated by the sacralization of this notion in official Chinese texts: "We are interested in preserving China's unity as a state. This is a holy good that every nation has to cultivate" (Mei Zhaorong, PRC ambassador to Germany (1996)). The term "sacred territory" is standard in PRC discussions of its territoriality.

[6] "As described by the literary critic Huang Ziping, Root-Seeking Literature celebrated "the aesthetic situation, the atmosphere, the cultural sedimentation,... the unrefined, wild and basic beauty in the crude, primitive mode of [Chinese] life"" Richard J. Smith, "Contemporary Chinese Literature And Art," Rice University website. Tian Zhuangzhuang's film *The Horse Thief* (1986) and Joan Chen's *Xiu xiu—the Sent Down Girl* (1999) apply similar notions to Tibetan nomads. Ma Jian's infamous story *Stick Out Your Furry Tongue, or Fuck-all* extended the approach of this school to depicting the supposed sexual profligacy of the elemental Tibetan (see Barmé and Minford (1988), pp. 413 ff.).

[7] The current front-runners in this competition are the leaders of Dechen Tibet Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan, where the claim is connected to tourism development and the construction of a new airport (see *China Daily*, (1998a)). See also Xinhua (1997a), plus the commentary by Korski (1997a).

[8] The CIA decision to support the Tibet operation was made in summer 1956, and the last payment was received in 1973 (see Knaus, pp. 139 and 373, note 10).

[9] Lopez notes that Western representations have damaged Tibetan political aspirations—"those fantasies are ultimately a threat to the realization of that goal" (p. 11)—but the impact of historical British intervention has not been greatly explored.

[10] See Goldstein (1995), note 47.

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[11] The text of this statement can be found in "Oral intervention by Rene Wadlow of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation to the UN Commission on Human Rights, 1985 concerning "Implementation of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief."

[12] Melvyn Goldstein refers to these meetings in his 1995 essay at note 45. The exile Government in 1986 commissioned a brief on Tibet's legal status from the US legal firm Wilder, Cutler and Pickering, which formed the basis of Michael van Walt van Praag's 1987 book *The Status of Tibet*, and provided much of the legal rationale for the Strasbourg Proposal; it discusses the role of human rights briefly but significantly in its conclusion (p. 203). Tsering Shakya and other observers have noted that this internationalization initiative coincided with an increase in political tension between India and China. Van Walt himself writes that the meetings began in 1985 (van Walt, 1996), not 1986 as Goldstein has it.

[13] There is a long history of Tibetan political perceptions of their state as unique. The Tibetan National Assembly issued a communiqué addressed to Chiang Kaishek in 1946, copied to the British mission in Lhasa, which relies on this theme: "There are many great nations on this earth who have achieved unprecedented wealth and might, but there is only one nation which is dedicated to the well-being of humanity in the world and that is the religious land of Tibet which cherishes a joint spiritual and temporal system" (cited in Goldstein (1989), p. 542). Shakya notes a similar rationale by Tibetan Government officials in their reasons for not applying to enter the League of Nations in the 1920s (Shakya (1985)).

[14] US Congressman Chris Smith, R-NJ, chairman of the House International Relations Committee's human rights panel (House hearing on U.S.-Chinese relations, cited in Tom Raum (1999)). See also Bernard Levin, 1994a, b.

[15] Apart from two cases documented cited in Mary Craig (1992) and TIN (1999b) reports of physical rapes by officials or police in Tibet since 1980 seem to be rather rare, despite unspecified allegations in the press (for example, Yuthok (1994) and *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (1996)). However, the sexual brutalization of nuns in prison, which was frequent in the period 1988-90, has been extensively documented; some of these cases are described in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* article.

[16] Other versions of the eroticization of "peripheral" peoples in state discourse in China are discussed in Harrell (1995), pp. 10-12 and Gladney (1996), pp. 103 ff.

[17] Israel Epstein writes of the knowledge brought by Wencheng as "warmly remembered" in Tibet (Epstein (1983), p. 16) and Stuart Gelder describes a performance of the play "Princess Wencheng" during his 1962 visit to Lhasa, which showed the princess bringing luxury goods to Tibet (Gelder (1964), p. 151). The Tibetan account of a *srin-mo* or demoness lying across the country and tied down by the temples, famously elaborated in the *Mani bka' 'bum* in about the twelfth century, appears to depict the civilizing of Tibet as the restraining of an elemental feminine force. The Tibetan writers credit this image to external sources—in this case geomantic analyses provided by Princess Wencheng—in a way similar to the use of foreign models to promote political objectives that I suggest in this paper. On the supine demoness myth see Michael Aris (1979), Per Soerensen (1994), Janet Gyatso (1989) and Matthew Kapstein (1992).

[18] See, for example, this extract from an article published in the official Chinese press by an American working as a teacher in Xiamen University, Fujian Province. "The mystical but fictional Shangri-La, the land where time stood still, has nothing to do with Tibet! Tibetans are real people, with no intention of either stopping the clock or turning it back—because today they have a future free from inhumane feudalism" (William N. Brown (1997)).

[19] See TIN (1999a). Hu's phrase about civilizing Tibet is still one of the main slogans used by the local government.

[20] "The compassionate struggle of the Tibetan people...is the clearest example of brutality against compassion in the world today" (Statement of Adam Yauch, June 1996). Other such cases have been noted in Lopez (1998), pp. 7-9.

[21] Baroness Strange, Debate on Tibet at the House of Lords (the upper house of the British Parliament) 10th May 1999. This view is also found in exile writings, such as those of Thubten Jigme Norbu and Tsi Shababpa. <sup>Foregro</sup>

[22] "For the last 47 years, the Tibetan people have maintained a peaceful, nonviolent resistance to the Chinese government's policy of cultural genocide; but time is running out for the Tibetans and the power to stop this is in our hands" ("BOYCOTT ALL CHINESE PRODUCTS," Press Statement, Milarepa Fund (San Francisco), 30th April 1996).

[23] For example, three monks were murdered in Dharamsala on 4th February 1997 by Tibetan followers of the banned Shugden sect, according to the Indian police (see Clifton (1997)). A Tibetan exile official was murdered in India for his association with Taiwan in the 1970s, and between 1987 and 1990 Alu Choenjor, an exile who had returned to Tibet, and Jamyang Norbu, a writer in Dharamsala, were both severely beaten in Dharamsala by conservative Tibetans for expressing dissident or radical views. Another example of strategic violence could be found in the seven known bombings which took place in Tibet between 1995 and 1997, at least one of them placed by a Tibetan monk (see TIN (1996b)).

[24] Benjamin Gilman (1999).

[25] For example, on 21st June 1996, the Liechtenstein Parliament passed a "Resolution to Welcome Dalai Lama" referring to "the endangered cultural identity of the Tibetan People" and calling for "a stop to be put to the obstruction of the cultural identity of the Tibetan People." See ICLT (1997) for other examples. Governments in the West repeated similar concerns in more muted terms—a European Union mission reported "the authorities in the TAR exercise extremely tight control over the principal elements of Tibetan religion and culture [but it] did not believe that this was derived from hostility to religion and culture per se" (European Union (1998)). A US government report noted that "repressive social and political controls continue to limit the fundamental freedoms of ethnic Tibetans" (U.S. Department of State (1997)).

[26] This was Rene Wadlow's 1985 submission on behalf of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (see note 11 above).

[27] The European Parliament resolution was passed on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1992. In May 1993, a conference of European Parliamentarians in London expressed "deep concern at the degradation of the Tibetan environment and exploitation of its natural resources for the benefit of China alone" (*Tibetan Bulletin* (1993)).

[28] Cited in Lehman and Barnett (1998). The fourth item in the Dalai Lama's Five Point Peace Plan of 1987 was "the restoration and protection of Tibet's natural environment." Toni Huber discusses this phenomenon in detail in Huber (1997).

[29] Cited in David DeVoss (1997). Richard Bernstein (1997) gives some helpful context to Professor Thurman's remark: "The image is apt, suggesting the innocent, pacific and largely defenseless Tibetans being clubbed by giant, powerful, merciless China. Given the harshness of the Chinese occupation, Tibet is a legitimate and compelling cause." Thurman has been seen as a champion of the romantic approach within Tibetan activism and religion in the US, and has responded that literary and romantic presentations do not impact on policy decisions, since these remain, he argues, almost entirely driven by political pragmatism (see Thurman (2001)).

[30] Chinese official discourse refers frequently to the uniqueness of Tibetan culture as well, but focuses on what are seen as its non-religious aspects, such as medical system or the *Gesar* folk-epics.

[31] "Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives concurring), That it is the sense of the Congress that Tibet, including those areas incorporated into the Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu, and Qinghai, is an occupied country under the established principles of international law whose true representatives are the Dalai lama and the Tibetan Government in exile as recognized by the Tibetan people" (ICLT (1997)).

[32] One attempt to raise this model was made in August 1997 when the Unrepresented Nations and

Peoples Organization (UNPO), a Dutch-based NGO, published the report of an unofficial fact-finding mission it had sent to Tibet which concluded that Tibet is a *de facto* colony of China (UNPO (1997)).

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[33] Lodi Gyari, the Special Envoy of the Dalai Lama in Washington, who was closely involved in forming the 1987 Dharamsala policy initiative, has made several efforts to reintroduce conceptions of colonialism in his presentations to Congress. See note 66 below.

[34] I am using the term "popular" here in its loosest sense, since I do not mean to suggest that the notion of "popular support" has been used by supporters of Tibet in the sense of mass or proletarian mobilization: the targeted support community has been within middle class or elite sectors of Western society, and there has been little attempt to approach working class or peasant communities, as far as I know. The Dalai Lama has, however, been much keener than many of his Western advisers about appearing on populist television shows or mass circulation newspapers (notably the Terry Wogan show in the United Kingdom), but I think these are isolated incidents.

[35] See Roberta Cohen (1988).

[36] Tibetan ministers in the Kashag (the exile Cabinet) involved in this decision pointed out to me shortly afterwards that they had practical reasons for focusing on Western countries for support—namely, they had no contacts elsewhere, and the financing for such trips could be obtained only from Western supporters. Lodi Gyari, the Dalai Lama's representative in Washington, has also pointed out to me that by the late 1980s the rhetoric of colonization and the appeal to a political alliance among colonized nations was already outmoded and regarded as specifically leftist or *passé* rhetoric, and replaced by *realpolitik* considerations.

[37] See Toni Huber in this volume.

[38] The testimony of foreign eyewitnesses was also important to Tibetans, above all those who had been in Tibet before 1950. See "Eyewitnesses to History," *Tibetan Bulletin* (1994) for foreigners' written statements (including Robert Ford, Fosco Maraini, Kazi Sonam Topgyal and Heinrich Harrer), plus a text by Hugh Richardson.

[39] This seems to have acted as a kind of substitute within "specialness" discourse for the role played by the notion of representativeness in leftist or statist political discourse. For a study of testimonies in such fora see McLagan (1996), chapter 3.

[40] Human Rights Watch in New York published its first reports dedicated to Tibet in 1988 (AsiaWatch 1988 a, b); Amnesty International followed soon after. The Tibet Information Network (TIN) was officially constituted in London in 1988 as a non-political research body. Dharamsala set up a Human Rights Desk within its Department of Information and International Relations, which was replaced in 1996 by the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy.

[41] The alleged indirect CIA funding of the ICJ "casts grave doubts on the impartiality of the findings," wrote Chris Mullin in Felix Greene and Chris Mullin (1978). Chris Mullin gives the original source for the accusation of CIA funding as *New York Times* 19th February 1967, p. 30, col.1, and *New York Times* 17th August 1965 p. 33, col.3. See also Tom Grunfeld (1987).

[42] Accounts of Westerner-obtained evidence of a campaign of forced sterilizations being carried out across Tibet were based initially on a single encounter between a Western activist and two monks in which, as far as I know, all the parties to the encounter were male, they had no common language, and the site of the incident alleged by the monks was not known. See Blake Kerr (1993), for details of his efforts to publicize this issue (discussed in MacLagan (1996) chapter 7, pp. 316 ff.). There was and is important evidence of forced abortions, and in some cases of forced sterilizations as well, in parts of Eastern Tibet in the early to mid-1980s, and of "pilot" campaigns in certain areas in Central Tibet in the 1990s, but it is still not clear how widely these excesses took place, or that these policies were widely implemented beyond the pilot schemes. In Central Tibet birth control policies applied only to urban areas and government employees from 1985 in principle and 1992 in practice; there were pilot projects in some rural areas, but the scope of these remains unclear. See TIN (1992, 2000) and Barnett (1994a, b) for detailed studies of birth control policies in Tibet.

[43] The term had been in use shortly after the 1959 Uprising, when the ICJ famously reported that it had found "prima facie evidence" of genocide, a reference to evidence it had collected of mass killings in Tibet. See ICJ (1959, 1960). Foregro

[44] The executions of two prisoners in Lhasa, Migmar Tashi and Dawa, on 18th May 1990 were political although the authorities declared at the time that the two men were guilty of trying to escape from prison. (see Tibet Information Network Doc. 32(Y), pt. 2, 17th May 1990). Reports of prison deaths, on the other hand, remain quite frequent, and up to 11 prisoners are said to have died as a direct or indirect result of police actions at Drapchi prison in Lhasa during or after protests on 1st and 4th May 1998.

[45] The idea of total cultural and demographic extinction was described, for example, by a US Congressman after visiting Tibet as a tourist: "The clock is ticking for Tibet. If nothing is done, a country, its people, religion and culture will continue to grow fainter and fainter and could one day disappear" (Congressman Frank Wolf (1997)).

[46] See Melvyn Goldstein and Cynthia M. Beall (1991). Another example of the disintegration of totalized representations can be seen in reports on the 1996 ban on Dalai Lama photographs. The ban was on the display, not the possession, of such photographs and it applied to public, not private, places (see *Xizang Ribao*, 5th April 1996, p. 1, or TIN (1996a)) but these distinctions were not always noted by politicians (see Wolf (1997) and Jessie Helms (1997)). Although arrests for possession or distribution of texts, tapes or books by the Dalai Lama are frequent, there are few reports of arrests for possession or display of a Dalai Lama photograph, apart from the case of Lobsang Sherab at Kirti Monastery in Ngaba (see TIN (1999a)). After 1996 sightings by Westerner visitors of a Dalai Lama photograph spotted in a monk's cell or private house were reported in several articles as evidence that the ban had been proven false, or that it had been rapidly relaxed.

[47] See for example the statements of Australian MP Gary Nehl, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, who "found no evidence of religious oppression, noting that he saw monks in the Potala freely engaging in normal religious rituals." (Xinhua (1999)). Stefan Baron, editor of the German magazine, *Wirtschaftswoche* ("Economic Weekly") after being taken to Lhasa wrote that the Potala Palace was proof that "the propaganda by the West about the destruction of the Tibetan culture is totally inaccurate." (Xinhua (1997b)).

[48] Chris Mullin (in his writings before 1988) and A. Tom Grunfeld presented the CIA's involvement with the Tibetan resistance movement as evidence discrediting the political credibility of the Dalai Lama and the exiles (see Grunfeld (1987), Mullin (1975) and Mullin and Wangyal (1983)). Mullin later changed his position on this issue, notably in a speech at the Bonn Hearing on Tibet organized by Petra Kelly, April 1989. See Kelly (1991).

[49] In terms of publications, the most notable work of this kind was John Avedon's book *In Exile from the Land of Snows* (1984).

[50] In the UK, for example, a Tibet Support Group—the first in the world to have that name, later used in other countries—was formed in 1988 primarily because the UK Government was rumored to have refused to issue a visa for the Dalai Lama. See McLagan (1996) for an analysis of the emergence of the global Tibet Movement.

[51] I owe this perception to Goldstein's remarks about the domestication of the issue in the US (see the section "The United States and the Tibet Question" in Goldstein (1995)).

[52] "I see more policemen [and] soldiers with guns on the streets where I live in Melbourne than were in Tibet in Lhasa," Peter Nugent, a Liberal MP and head of the parliamentary human rights sub-committee, told ABC radio in August 1999 (Brendan Nicholson (1999))

[53] From the time of the Vienna Conference in 1993, if not earlier, Chinese diplomats dropped the use of the term "Asian values," and asserted that it accepted that human rights were universal but subject to local variations in interpretation. This strategy prevented China from being sidelined or regionalized in international discussions of human rights. China had since at least the early 1980s accepted the right of interference in internal affairs in terms of some but not all human rights abuses, presumably to left

action on the issues of apartheid and Palestine.

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[54] The Chinese government was able to use the argument that country-specific human rights critics were a concealed form of Western "bullying" to defeat attempts to raise the Tibet or China issues in the UN.

[55] Reports of human rights abuses in China increased markedly from November 1998 with the widespread arrests and sentencing of members of the Chinese Democracy Party and in 1999 with the banning of the Falungong sect.

[56] See Barnett (1991).

[57] It is clear that the decision not to execute the Tibet University student activist Lobsang Tenzin in March 1990 was due in part to international pressure, since Amnesty International was named in an official press article at the time; in Chinese law there was no reason to commute his death sentence. Most other cases in this category related to sentences being shortened by a small amount (see, for example, UPI (1994)), but arbitrary killings definitely decreased.

[58] The debate over this phenomenon arose principally over US performance at the annual session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, when it would typically announce its support for a resolution criticizing Chinese human rights practices too late for other, smaller nations to receive appropriate voting instructions from their home capitals and so too late for the resolution to have a realistic chance of success.

[59] I discuss this in more detail in Lehman and Barnett (1998).

[60] "The Tibetan problem is not simply a problem of continuing human rights violations against the people of Tibet, nor should it be dealt with as such.... Fundamentally, the issue of Tibet is an issue of colonial rule" (Lodi Gyari (1997)). As Michael van Walt told a conference of Tibet support groups in 1996: "Human rights is a useful tool but it can be dangerous if it continues to remain by itself. I say that because...China...has grown immune to it" (Michael van Walt (1996), p. 100).

[61] Visits to the US by officials from the TAR Government, which have been carried out since 1991 under the aegis of the US Information Agency, include showing the visiting officials examples of inter-ethnic relations in the US so that the visitors can "learn more about the contribution of racial and ethnic minorities to American culture... [and] about Native American culture, including the relationship of tribes to federal, state and local government" (internal USIA documentation citing a Chinese source, 1999)

[62] Personal information from one of the devisers of the plan, December 1998.

[63] See the collection of newspaper articles and editorials surrounding the December 1996 visit of Jiang Zemin to India published by TPPRC (Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Center) in 1997. This issue is also prominent in current Chinese political commentary: "For China to lose such a vast barrier...would expose our fatal "underbelly," [and] would be unacceptable from a national security perspective. Preparing for a possible future conflict with India is the bottom line as to why the Central Government cannot allow Tibetan independence." (Wang Lixiong (1999)).

[64] Dawa Norbu (1997), pp. 336-37.

[65] In the US Congress there were also attempts to introduce this model, especially after the Indian nuclear tests of 1998 (see Gilman (1999)).

[66] "China is potential threat number one," the defence minister [Fernandes] told the private Home TV network.... "China has its nuclear weapons stockpiled in Tibet right along India's borders."" (AFP (1998)).

[67] See, for example, Agehananda Bharati's 1974 article, cited in Miller (1988).

[68] See Reuters (1998) and Barbara Crossette (1998).

[69] The idea that a brief visit to Tibet constitutes superior knowledge coincides with the Chinese official

slogan that "seeing is believing" and its long-standing practice of inviting foreign politicians and others to Lhasa. See Tsan-Kuo Chang (1999) for the use of this argument by the Chinese in the 1960s to discredit American journalists who were then not allowed to enter China; for an academic example see Vincann Adams (1996).

[70] See, for example, A. Tom Grunfeld in *The Guardian*, 10th December 1988; Jane Macartney (1996) and Fred Lane (1994).

[71] *Xizang Ribao* (1996). The sentence following this quotation illustrates how the advent of modernity and wealth is used to left social and political control: "Translating this blueprint into reality requires...requires a stable social environment" .

[72] "After 30 years as an "autonomous region", Tibet is once again suffering a Chinese invasion. But this time the forces of the market, not Marx, are responsible" (Teresa Poole (1995); see also, for example, Macartney (1996)). For a discussion of the immigration issue see Peter Hessler (1999). The Dalai Lama acknowledged that there is a problem of interpretation, but focuses on sinicization of culture as a threat: "I recognize that in all these years, the Chinese have modernized Tibet in certain ways. They have built schools, hospitals, roads, houses. But at the same time, they are introducing political education in schools and this is based on Chinese culture. The risk is of the extinction of our culture" (Reuters (1997)).

[73] Bernward Krurup (1994). A similar article about "Himalayan Bangkok" had appeared the previous month in London (see Mike Dempsey (1996)). Tibetan and Chinese reports of the increase in sexual commerce are documented in *Social Evils: Prostitution and Pornography in Lhasa*, TIN (1999).

[74] In fact, brothels have been reported as commonplace around the Potala since at least the seventeenth century; the difference is that now the prostitutes and procurers are predominantly Chinese. Some depictions of modernity focused on karaoke bars and pop videos (see Christopher Gunness, (1994)).

[75] "The PRC has undertaken a program of mass infusion of Chinese people who probably now outnumber Tibetans in their own country...the inescapable conclusion is that China is swallowing Tibet. Stores, hotels, bazaars, businesses and tradesmen are largely Chinese. Driving out from Lhasa, one encounters as many Chinese villagers, shepherds, farmers, construction workers and travelers as Tibetan. In short, Tibet is disappearing... America and the rest of the free world must do more to urge China to back off from its clear goal to plunder Tibet" (Congressman Frank Wolf (1997)). This is, however, the only report of Chinese shepherds or villagers in the TAR. I have discussed the issue of perceptions of immigration in some detail in Barnett (1993). See also the *Special Envoy for Tibet Act of 1994*, US Senate and Congress (1994)).

[76] U.S. Department of State (1997).

[77] Wang Lixiong (1999). Official texts also group modernization with the campaign against the independence movement, or describe one as the basis of the other: "Of course, the success or failure of the anti-splittist struggle depends on whether we can further promote reform and open policy in Tibet and its modernization construction" (Tenzin (1993)). Chinese public official texts since 1994 regularly say that the Dalai Lama's aim is to stop modernization (see Chen Kuiyuan (1996)).

[78] Reuters (1995). The story was developed in Germany by the magazine *Focus*, Muenich, on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1995. The exile Government replied in a press statement (Liaison Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama for Japan (1995)). The Chinese took up the Asahara issue, paraphrasing the *Focus* story in *Guangming Ribao*, 9th October 1995 (BBC SWB, 16th October 1995) and in *Xizang Ribao* (1995). It reappeared in *China's Tibet*, March 1996, summarized in Xinhua (1996).

[79] For Western reports of the Harrer connection, see Nicholas Hellen (1996), *Stern* (1997) and Julia Ferguson (1997). For the Nazi allegations in Chinese media see Li Jianhua (1997), p. 6, and *China Daily* (1998b). For a summary of the *Beijing Review* version, see Tom Korski (1997b).

[80] See Li Bing (1995).

[81] The strongest attack in the Western media on the Dalai Lama was probably Christopher Hitchens

(1998) in *Salon Magazine*: "Far from his holier-than-all image, the Dalai Lama supports such questionable causes as India's nuclear testing, sex with prostitutes and accepting donations from a Japanese terrorist cult." Foregro

[82] In fact the Dalai Lama and his advisers had strategically encouraged Tibetan youth movements to express diverse opinions, because an image of increasing extremism among Tibetans was thought to make him look more conciliatory, and thus to encourage Beijing to come to the negotiating table. Personal informant in Exile administration, 1989.

[83] The press campaign by followers of this sect, in the form of leaflets sent by fax to the international media, began in England in May 1996 and led to a number of articles, for example Prakash Nanda (1996). The Tibetan Government in Exile responded to the campaign on 14th May 1996—see Kashag (1996). British papers later published articles discrediting the sect's English organisation and followers (see Madeleine Bunting (1996) and Andrew Brown (1996).

[84] See Clinton (1998).

[85] The Dalai Lama and the exile government had expressly sought to avoid that outcome during and after the talks with Beijing which collapsed in 1985. See the Dalai Lama's letter to Jiang Zemin (Dalai Lama (1993b)) and Dawa Norbu (1997), p. 325.

[86] See for example, the US position that "the Administration has consistently urged the Chinese government to increase respect for human rights and to engage in a substantive dialogue with the Dalai Lama" (Julia V. Taft (1999)).

[87] In fact one parliamentary resolution does specify a criterion for the outcome of negotiations: the European Parliament resolved in 1997 that China should reach "an agreement which satisfies the legitimate requests of the Tibetan people" (European Parliament (1997)).

[88] Cited in Maura Moynihan (1997).

[89] Lopez (1998), p. 206.

[90] See Freeman (1997).

[91] See for example, Ron Gluckman (1996).

[92] For the "Oxfords" see Leslie Plommer (1995), Ron Gluckman (1996) and AFP (1988). The new version arose from a single sentence: "A 61-year-old claret-robed monk who wears Rockport shoes and a wristwatch, the Dalai Lama arrived from New York on a United Airlines flight" (Bruce Finley (1997)). This appeared in AP as: "The Dalai Lama, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his nonviolent efforts to resolve the Tibetan conflict, arrived at Denver International Airport in a claret-red robe, wearing designer walking shoes and a wrist watch" (AP (1997)).

[93] Interview with *Vanity Fair*, cited in Philip Delves Broughton (1999).

[94] For an argument putting the case against Lhasa's political claim to Eastern areas, see Melvyn Goldstein and Cynthia Beall (1994).

[95] The Dalai Lama does of course receive hundreds of letters, appeals, petitions and visits from Tibetans inside Tibet, so his support base and popularity are not in doubt.

[96] Dawa Norbu (1997), p. 337. Some commentators have said that this was due to popular resistance to pluralism, not to the Dalai Lama, who had to use his personal authority to force a draft constitution on the Exile Assembly which gave the Assembly the right to impeach him.

[97] The Dalai Lama (1993a).

[98] Pico Iyer (1997).

[99] Pico Iyer (1997).

[100] This ceremony had the added advantage for the Tibetan exile leaders that it is one of the few major state events of that time which the Chinese authorities cannot easily claim provides evidence of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet, because the Chinese claim to have officiated at this event was explicitly rejected by Ngapo Ngawang Jigme, former Chairman of the TAR, in 1989: "At the time of the enthronement of the present Dalai Lama Wu Zhongxin of the KMT came, but not to enthrone the Dalai Lama... He just came to convey greetings" (Tape recording of Ngapo Ngawang Jigme's speech (undated but probably 1989), held as TIN Doc. T1(XZ) and T2(XZ). Ngapo published similar statements in an article in *Xizang Ribao*, 11th August 1989, cited in Cao Changqing (1994). Other sources say the article was published on 31st August 1989.