

TIBET TODAY: A REGION OF CHINA

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The world today

In order to find a way out of the seemingly perennial Tibetan dilemma, His Holiness The Fourteenth Dalai Lama called a special meeting for the third time, November 17-22, 2008 at Dharamsala, without Himself participating in it, in order to give the delegates absolute freedom to express their opinion without any reservations. The first two such meetings were held in 1951 and 1959. For more than half a century, the Dalai Lama has been trying to find a mutually acceptable solution to the vexed issue. As a septuagenarian, he has, however, justifiably lost hope. He said: "As far as I am concerned, I have given up."¹

Yet the Chinese charge that the Tibetans are 'splittists' is untenable; for they do not want to split the country. All that they want is a meaningful autonomy within China and within the framework of the Chinese constitution. However, this writer does not see any possibility of any fruitful discussion with the Chinese government unless the mindset of the Han leaders undergoes a rational transformation.

Four decades ago, I wrote an article 'Tibet Today: A Nation in Chains' which was published in the Tibetan Review in November 1968. The paper was serialised in *Now!* November 19-21, 2008. The response from the people has encouraged me to pen my thought on the subject in the world of 2008. In 1968, I thought that Tibet might be able to regain her pre-October, 1950 *de facto* independent status in view of the power politics among the major Powers of the world. During the interlude of forty years, there has, however, been a sea change in the international politics, diplomacy and power equations in the comity of nations. The bi-polar interpretation of world politics in terms of a struggle between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics for world supremacy metamorphosed into a uni-polar planet after the disintegration of the latter on December 25, 1991.

Harold Joseph Laski (1893-1950), the celebrated British political scientist from the London School of Economics and Political Science, had written as early as 1925: "Russia cannot exist as a Communist

¹ *The Statesman*, Siliguri, Nov 17, 2008.

State when she is surrounded by capitalist communities” (1960: 537). Yet during the period, 1968-2008, China steadily advanced towards the status of a major power in the world. The respective Gross Domestic Products in trillion dollars (2002 estimate) of USA, China and Japan are \$10.45, \$5.989 and \$ 3.651.² By the second half of this century, China will be the richest and the most powerful country in history, replacing the United States of America. As early as 1960, Friedmann wrote: “The most important change in the world balance of power results from the emergence of Communist China as the third world Power” (1960: 87-8)—the first two were USA and USSR. As the twentieth century was ushered in, John Milton Hay (1838-1905), who was Secretary of State for the USA from 1898 to 1905, asserted: “The world’s peace rests with China, and whoever understands China, holds the key to world politics during the next five centuries” (Bowles 1955: 69). Very truly did Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) say: “China - there lies a sleeping giant. Let him sleep, for when he wakes he shall shake the world” (*ibid.*: 67). Writing in 1960, Friedmann argued: “After centuries of unchallenged Western supremacy, it is not easy for the people of the West to adjust their thoughts and actions to a world situation in which the balance of world politics would be determined by Asia rather than Europe or even North America” (*ibid.*: 218). During the last two hundred years, the world was dominated first by the British with the help of the British Navy and the British-Indian Army and then the Americans by way of the possession of ‘weapons of mass destruction’. The American domination of the world, represented by the recent swashbuckling occupant of the White House has been resented to such an extent, even by the Americans themselves, that the “approval rating of US President George Bush, on the last leg of his second term, had reached an all-time low in modern opinion polls since 1938, with a record number of Americans saying the country is on the ‘wrong track’.”³ He had to be strictly kept indoors during the election campaign of the new presidential candidate of his Republican party. John McCain had to bear the cross of the existing Republican President Bush and he lost the election to a relatively younger and inexperienced first ‘black’ candidate.

Laski also wrote: “It must be remembered that any great power is a menace to the peace of the world if it has ambitions it cannot fulfill except by the making of war. That was once true of Spain; it was once

² *Competition Refresher Book of the year 2006*, Bright Careers, Delhi, 2005, pages 323, 262 and 282.

³ *The Statesman*, Siliguri, 19 June, 2008, p. 6.

true of France; it is true in our own day of Germany and Japan. But we have to remember that, in the next age, it may be true of the United States if the character of its economic system pushes it, as may well be the case, to imperialism” (1968: 228). The Laskian vista may well be true also of China in less than fifty years.

Consequent upon the meteoric rise of China and its influence in international arena and the concomitant weakening of the American influence, the United Nations Organization had no alternative but to admit the People’s Republic of China as a member and rightfully allot to it permanent seat as one of the Five Big Powers—USA, UK, USSR (Russia since 1991), France and China—in the Security Council in 1971. Prior to this that seat was unjustifiably occupied by the tiny island of Taiwan—with the support of the United States which was hoping that the Government in Taiwan might one day take over mainland China. The year 1972 witnessed the unprecedented visit of US President Richard Milhous Nixon (1913-1994) to China as the communist country had become too important to be ignored any longer in the American national interest. The Sino-American rapprochement led to the gradual withdrawal of covert CIA funding to the Dalai Lama’s office and the Tibetan resistance against the Chinese in Tibet ceased. “The Dalai Lama sent a taped message to the Mustang fighters ordering them to lay down their arms, but rather than surrender, many preferred to die” (French 2003: 264).

China’s meteoric rise is not due to, but in spite of, communism. It is due to incandescent patriotism, an uncompromising sense of national unity and determination to surpass the advanced countries in everything - be it in Olympic gold medals, Olympic-sized airports and other modern infrastructure, the health profile of its citizens or in any other parameter of development. It is this spirit of nationalism, among all the age-groups of the population, that is feeding China’s determination to become the greatest nation on the planet.⁴

Moreover, the founding fathers of the Chinese republic were dedicated and devoted men and women. Bowles (1955: 105) writes:

The administration of the country is carried on by men who live under strict discipline, whether civilian or military. Many are paid no salaries, but are given only board and lodging, a bare minimum of clothing, some cigarettes, free education for their children and medical attention. Selfless young Chinese have returned from abroad to lead hard and austere lives. ‘The administration is absolutely honest’, writes a

⁴ *The Sunday Express*, New Delhi, August 31, 2008, p.7.

recently expelled Catholic priest who warned against underestimating the strength of the Peking Government. 'I imagine that under the present regime it would be more difficult to buy a Chinese official than an official in the Western countries'. Where salaries are paid, they are extremely low. Mao Tse-tung is said to receive less than the equivalent of \$150 a month. And the earnings of his subordinates are proportionately lower. An awed Indian official once said to me, 'Mao himself has only one suit, and his wife works for a weekly wage'.⁵

Tibet Past and Present

Tibet during the British rule in India enjoyed virtual independence from China. The representative of the Manchu dynasty in Lhasa called the Amban had no effective power. The imperial authority declined to such an extent that in 1856 when Nepal attacked Tibet, China had no role to play. On the conclusion of the war, Nepal and Tibet signed in 1856 a treaty which was not objected to by China. But the British, to keep off other imperial powers—especially the Russian—invented the so-called 'Roman concept' of Chinese suzerainty which worked well in their imperial interests. A year before the fall of the Manchu dynasty, when the Chinese Imperial army entered into Tibet "to facilitate the maintenance of order and for the protection of the existing foreign trade marts" the Dalai Lama fled Lhasa in the night on February 12, 1910.⁶ The Dalai Lama entered into Sikkim through either Jelep La or Nathula—most likely through Jelep La—and "the Maharaj Kumar met him at Rhenock and accompanied His Holiness to Darjeeling and Calcutta."⁷

In October 1911 the revolution against the Ch'ing began; on 12 February 1912 the last Ch'ing emperor abdicated, and, on the 15th Yuan Shih-k'ai was elected president of the new Chinese Republic. Chinese troops in Tibet mutinied and looted Lhasa. In April the Chinese garrison in Lhasa surrendered to the Tibetans but refused to be repatriated to China in the hopes that an expedition from the east would come to their rescue. The Chinese Republican government

⁵ Bowles was US ambassador to India twice in 1951 and 1963. Like John Kenneth Galbraith, he was pro-India. He went even to the extent of defending Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's 'deploring' US bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong which made President Lyndon Baines Johnson 'furious' in July, 1966 (Frank. *Indira*, Harper Collins: London, 2002, p.299).

⁶ *The Times Archives* April 20, 1910 reprinted in *The Times of India*, New Delhi April 26, 1993. Pasted on p.109 of Sir Charles Bell: *Tibet Past and Present*, 1924.

⁷ *The Administration Report of the Sikkim State 1909-10*, Superintendent, Government Printing, India, Calcutta 1920, page 1.

attempted to make the Chinese garrison commander in Lhasa their representative, but this move was resisted by the Tibetans, who demanded the evacuation of all Chinese soldiers and officials from Tibet. Chinese troops were finally removed from Tibet, via India, at the end of 1912 (Smith 1997: 181).

His Holiness remained in Darjeeling till July 1912 when He reentered Tibet “taking up residence at Samdong Monastery near the lake Yamdrok Yumtso until the last of the Chinese garrison could be removed” (*ibid.*). The Chinese were repatriated from Tibet to China through Sikkim and Calcutta sea port.

Owing to the repatriation, from Tibet through Sikkim to China, of 1,263 men, 93 women and 46 children, subjects of China, the Sikkim Darbar was called upon to supply transport, et cetera. This involved heavy expenditure. It was borne by the Government of India.⁸

“In January 1913 the Dalai Lama finally returned to Lhasa. Tibet was free of the Chinese for the first time since 1720.” In January, 1913, the Dalai Lama proclaimed that Tibet was independent and signed a treaty with Mongolia (Bell 124: 304). There were no Chinese in Tibet till October 7, 1950.

On the 7th of October, 1950, forty thousand Chinese soldiers invaded Kham in Eastern Tibet (French 2003: 259). Exactly one month after the invasion, Sardar Vallabhai Patel (1875-1950), Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister of India, wrote a prophetic letter to the Prime Minister Nehru on November 7, 1950 stating that

very soon they [the Chinese] will disown all the stipulations which Tibet has entered into with us in the past. That throws into the melting pot a frontier and commercial settlements with Tibet on which we have been functioning and acting during the last half a century. The undefined state of the frontier and the existence on our side of a population with its affinities to the Tibetans or Chinese have all the elements of the potential trouble between China and ourselves (Arpi 2004: 225).

The Sardar proposed that India should send a token Indian force to help the Tibetans in resisting the Chinese invaders (Thomas 1960: 210). His proposal, however, fell through.

In the fifties, India had to withdraw all the rights it had acquired since 1904 as forewarned by Sardar Patel. The situation on the peaceful pre-independence Sino-Indian border—as peaceful as the US-Canadian

⁸ The Administration Report of the Sikkim State 1918-19, p 3-4.

border—changed overnight and became volatile for the first time in the history of the two biggest Asian countries.

It was a grievous mistake committed by the first Prime Minister of India who deviated from the time-honoured policy of keeping China out of Tibet by gainsaying Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. Once India accepted Tibet as “the Tibet region of China” for the first time in 1954 in the treaty between India and China, it became difficult to controvert the Chinese claim over territories which had been once a part of Tibet. It is an incontrovertible historical fact that the Himalayan areas—some in India and some outside India—were once a part of Tibet in the past. For instance, there is a place called Sadiya, Assam, India. The original name was Sa-di-ley-ya. ‘Sa’ means land; ‘di’ means this; ‘ley’ means from; ‘ya’ means up. The word is Tibetan and Sadiya marked the boundary of Tibet in the south. Moreover, parts of Sikkim, Bhutan and other areas on the Tibetan periphery were once a part of Tibet in the past. It may be recalled that on February 27, 1947, Sikkim had sent to the Government of India a memorandum prepared by Sirdar D K Sen, laying a claim over Darjeeling (Moktan 2004: 113-27). Sikkim was “a former tributary of Tibet” and “originally under Tibetan rule” (Moraes 1966: 191-92). Even as late as 1873, John Ware Edgar, Deputy Commissioner, Darjeeling, during his visit to Kabi, presently Kabi-Tingda in North Sikkim—spelt ‘Kubbi’ by Edgar—found that “the people of this village pay their chief revenue to Thibet, but are bound to do certain services for the Sikhim Rajah, and to supply some food for his household” (Edgar 1969: 55). Sir Charles Bell wrote: Sikkim is “a State of Tibetan origin and originally part of Tibet” (1924: 170). Bell was “Late British Political Representative in Tibet, Bhutan and Sikkim” from 1908 to 1919. He was the greatest authority on the history of the region under his charge. It may be noted that the British protectorate over Sikkim was in accordance with the treaty between the Emperor of China and the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and Empress of India in March 1890.

As stated above, if Tibet belongs to China, then, it follows *ipso facto* that the areas which belong to Tibet also belong to China. Some areas in the North East including part of the Indian State of Arunachal Pradesh were once a part of Tibet in the past which were annexed to the Indian empire by the force of British arms. The Sixth Dalai Lama, Tshangs dbyangs rgya mtsho (1683-1706) was born in Tawang in present day Arunachal Pradesh. The house where His Holiness was born is shown on page 161 of Sonam B Wangyal’s book *Footprints in the Himalayas*, 2006. The McMahon Line “from the east of Bhutan,

along the northern and eastern border of Assam, round to the meeting-place of China, Tibet and the Burmese hinterland” (Bell 1924: 192) was defined in the Simla convention in 1913 between Tibet and British India. The convention was not agreed between China and the British Government. Since the successor Government in India accepted in 1954 that Tibet was a region of China, the McMahon Line demarcating the border between Tibet and India would not be binding on China. However, it is a dangerous doctrine that once an area has been a part of another country, the latter has the right to annex the former at a future date. This argument would allow the British to conquer again its former imperial possessions if it has the desire and military strength.

The main policy of Great Britain in India was to maintain Tibet as a buffer state between China and the British empire and to keep off the Russians from Tibet. The British, being an alien power wanted to ensure that there was absolute peace on the frontier by surrounding its Indian (Burma was a part of India till 1935) possessions by a series of buffer states on the western, northern and north-eastern borders. Thus Iran and Afghanistan in the west were under its sphere of influence; Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan provided the inner and outer bulwark between China and India; Siam or Thailand was the bumper between the British and French empires in the east. Britain had no problem defending India against any naval attack since she was the strongest naval power in the world and the Indian ocean was considered a British lake where no power dared to enter and disturb the British Indian empire. Britain however was not sure of the loyalty of her Indian subjects who could rise in revolt again as in 1857; and an imperial power cannot hold on to its possession if the imperial army had to fight on the border and also to help the Police simultaneously in quelling internal rebellion.

Frank Moraes has written: “Even in the days of British rule in India more than one Chinese spokesman urged the blending of the ‘five colors’, these being China, Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan” (1966: 192). He also writes:

The Chinese irredentist urge is not confined only to Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal and Ladakh. Over forty years ago the late Sun Yat-Sen cited a long list of so-called lost territories which China would reclaim. ‘We lost,’ he declared, ‘Korea, Formosa and Peng Fu to Japan after the Sino-Japanese War, Annam to France and Burma to Britain. In addition, the Ryukyu Islands, Siam, Borneo, Sarawak, Java, Ceylon, Nepal and Bhutan were once tributary States to China’. Chiang Kai-shek subsequently repeated these claims, and Mao Tse-tung has

reiterated them. Mao in fact traces the beginnings of his political consciousness to his realization of China's territorial losses (1966: 183).

Tibet and China

The entire North Indian cities and important industrial belts are within the devastatingly striking distance from the Tibetan plateau, which is the highest area in the world. During the last two hundred years, the world was dominated by the British and the Americans. "The supremacy of any one nation or civilization", Friedmann writes, "is a passing phenomenon, covering at best a span of a few centuries" (1960: 218). The West has seen that China is going to be the next super power in less than fifty years.

The Dalai Lama was the greatest votary of China hosting Olympic. His Holiness is a man of compassion and there is no place in his heart for hatred. He has been trained from childhood to love all sentient beings. No two countries in history have such an intimate relation as between China and Tibet. In fact the title 'Dalai Lama' was given to the fifth Dalai Lama by a Chinese emperor of Mongolian origin. The Ming emperors and the Dalai Lama had mutual interests; the former wanted the influence of the Lama to rein in his Buddhists subjects and the latter to secure himself against any possible challenge to his authority.

The possession of India made Britain the greatest and mightiest power in history. The possession of Tibet by China will facilitate it towards its goal of the sole super power. The European countries and USA have rightly condemned the Chinese action in Tibet as a violation of human rights. But if we consider European peoples' actions in the present day United States, Mexico, Australia, Brazil, etc., it will be a pathetic story. For instance, the so-called Red Indians were ruthlessly wiped out in the American continent. "By destroying the buffalo herds, the whites were destroying the Indians' main source of food and supplies" (Newmann 2004: 8). On October 2, 1932, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to his daughter: The Red Indians "were practically exterminated, and most of them died off under the new conditions. There are not many left today of these people who once inhabited a whole continent" (1949: 356). In modern parlance, the crime of genocide was committed in the Australian, North and South American continents in the 18th and 19th centuries. It is unfortunate that the original Americans are not called Americans; they are called 'Indians' and the settlers are called 'Americans'. Similarly the native people in present day Mexico were wiped out. The same is the story in Australia and South America.

However I do not intend to give the impression that the Chinese brutality should be condoned.

For their present plight, the Tibetans themselves are responsible to a considerable extent. The British Government in India wanted to open up Tibet for trade; and several attempts were made through 'the suzerain power', China, but failed. Then Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, who rightly understood that 'the Chinese suzerainty' was a 'constitutional fiction' wrote to the Dalai Lama; but the letters were returned unopened. If Tibet had responded to the British overtures, the whole of Tibet perhaps would have been independent. Even if the entire Tibet could not have been independent, it can be said with certainty that Outer Tibet would have been independent in the same way as Outer Mongolia, which is much nearer to Beijing than Tibet, is independent today. At the time of the collapse of the Manchu empire, both Tibet and Mongolia were constituent units of China. Both had Outer and Inner areas, called Outer and Inner Tibet and Outer and Inner Mongolia. Inner Mongolia is still a part of China. With the help of the two-year old USSR, the Mongolian People's Republic was proclaimed in 1924. In 1945, another Sino-Russian Treaty was concluded according to which the Chiang Kai-shek government of Nationalist China recognized the complete independence of Outer Mongolia. The action of the British empire in India would have similarly led to the independence of Outer Tibet. The British empire wanted an independent Outer Tibet, not because of love for Tibet; but because it did not want China on its threshold. A quarrelsome and powerful neighbor is a perpetual headache. Despite repeated attempts from the British-Indian Government, Tibet kept aloof on the grounds that the British "were harboring ulterior designs on their country and their religion" (Bell 1924: 62). But the British policy in India was to annex only those territories which were fertile and rich in mineral resources and leave the rest under the largely autonomous Princely States which were in their largest number in the semi-desert areas of Rajputana (now Rajasthan and the Hyderabad region). Britain's interest in Tibet was to gain access to the vast Chinese market and to maintain the buffer zone to prevent any possible collision between the two empires. "In 1910, the Tibetan Government would have welcomed a British Protectorate," the Tibetan Ministers remarked: "The Indian States were in an ideal position, for each was safe from external aggression and free from interference as regards its internal administration. They sighed as they added, 'That is how we should like Tibet to be'" (Bell 1924: 246-7). Bell continues: "But it was recognized on our side from the first that this

would have devolved far too heavy a burden upon us, the responsibility of protecting the distant and difficult expanses of Tibet” (*ibid.*: 247).

“The first communication of the Government of independent India to the Foreign Office of the Tibetan Government was to request the latter to ratify the Simla Convention.” Unfortunately, “Lhasa refused to ratify the Simla Convention until territories such as Darjeeling and Kalimpong were returned” (Apri 2004: 11). The Simla Convention was finally ratified by the Governments of Tibet and India in 1948 (*ibid.*: 123).

It was not in the interest of Tibet to refuse to recognize the independent government of India as “the legal inheritor of the treaties, rights and obligations of British India.” By the time it was too late, Tibet recognized the Indian Government as the successor to the British-Indian government on 11 June, 1948 (*ibid.*: 12). Moreover, Nehru was unhappy with the Tibetan view on ‘lost territories’. These factors contributed to Nehru’s policy towards Tibet.

The possibility of militarily defending Tibet was formally discussed at that time, by the US and British governments. The conclusion was that it was not easy to help the Tibetans as the terrain was not favorable and in any case it was up to the Indian Government to decide since the arms or equipment would have to transit through India (*ibid.*: 19ff).

The Government of India made it clear that “it cannot, however, render active military assistance in form of dispatch of troops to Lhasa” (*ibid.*: 19ff). If India had taken the required initiative, it was likely that the Western countries would have helped Tibet in consonance with their policy of containment of communism anywhere and everywhere, as incorporated in the Truman Doctrine in the name of the US President Harry S Truman on March 12, 1947.

The Treaty between the Republic of India and the People’s Republic of China on Trade and Intercourse between ‘the Tibet region of China’ and India was signed on 29th April, 1954 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing by the Indian Ambassador N Raghavan and Chang Han-fu, the Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister. Normally, a treaty is signed between two countries without mentioning any particular area within the country. But the Chinese diplomacy succeeded in mentioning Tibet as ‘the Tibet region of China’. Never before was Tibet referred to as ‘the Tibet region of China’. Thus, Tibet was sacrificed at the altar of Sino-Indian friendship. The treaty was then ratified on 4 June 1954 (*ibid.*: 211).

Subsequent events demonstrated that the treaty was the source of perennial border problems. The Chinese government complained on

29th June 1954—only after 25 days of the ratification of the treaty—that Indian troops with rifles had crossed into the Tibet region of China and intruded into Wu-je area. It appears that India negotiated the 1954 Treaty out of compulsion. The Prime minister, J.L. Nehru said: “We must give up these facilities such as telegraph lines; if we do not give them up voluntarily, then we shall be forced to give them up. The fact is that if we did not like to give up those things, we would have been forced to give them up. We must accept this fact” (Prime Minister’s speech in the Lok Sabha, 18 May, 1954 (Chakravarty 1961: 60).

But if China is aspiring to be the super power it should behave responsibly and allow full autonomy to the Tibetans without compromising its national security and unity. It should withdraw the People’s Liberation Army from Tibet and the Sino-Indian international border, keeping only border check posts to prevent illegal ingress or egress into China

Tibet as a Region of China

Tibet—a comparatively vast area—is the roof of the world and its possession gives China geopolitical advantage in its cherished aim of dominating the Asian continent and ultimately the world. The might of the erstwhile British empire, as stated above, was founded upon the resources and strategic importance of India. Britain was relegated to a minor power after the loss of the Indian empire. Similarly, Tibet as a part of China will give the latter strategic importance and security. If Tibet either falls into the hand of or becomes an ally of, another major power, the security of China will be gravely threatened.

The importance of the Tibet region also lies in the fact that most of the major and minor rivers in China and Southeast Asia including the Indian sub-continent originate there. For instances, the 2,897 kilometre long Indus river of India and Pakistan, which is one of the largest irrigation systems in the world ; the 2,704 kilometre long Brahmaputra which is an important waterway of southern Asia; and the 2,400-kilometre long Salween, the major river of Southeast Asia and the longest in Myanmar. Other major rivers—Mekong and Yangtze—flow through Tibet.

Only in the event of China degenerating into a condition similar to the one obtaining in the first decade of the last century can Tibet hope to regain its de facto or full independence—a possibility which does not seem likely.

In the interest of the Tibetans themselves, therefore, they should cooperate with the Chinese and convince them that the meaningful

autonomy will not in any way harm the Chinese national interest. The Dalai Lama said his faith in the Chinese officials was becoming “thinner and thinner” while his faith in the Chinese people was “growing stronger and stronger” and he advised the Tibetans to “develop good relations” with the Han Chinese people.⁹ The advice of the Dalai Lama is timely. The Tibetans should try to win the hearts of the Hans who should exert pressure on their government to grant meaningful autonomy to Tibet. The Dalai Lama also rightly pointed out that people showing concern and sympathy for the Tibetan cause should not be seen as “pro-Tibetan” but as “advocates of justice” (*ibid.*). China, the future super power, should act magnanimously and give absolute autonomy to Tibet retaining only external affairs, defense, communication, currency, and citizenship. The Central Government should not interfere with the Tibetan social, religious and customary practices, unless they hinder the political, civil and human rights of the Tibetans. All civilian posts in Tibet should be manned by the Tibetans with the Dalai Lama as the spiritual and temporal Head of the government of the Tibet region of China. Their peaceful coexistence will be in the interest of both—especially the Tibetans. A happy Tibet will strengthen the hand of China in its bid towards gaining the super power status. With some exceptions, history has been a witness to the coexistence of a theocratic Tibet under the thirteen incarnations of the Dalai Lama and the imperial China. Let the millennium herald the peaceful and exemplary coexistence between a theist Tibet and an atheist China within the Chinese constitutional framework.

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⁹ *The Statesman, Siliguri*, Monday, Nov 24, 2008.

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Today, Tibet's incorporation into China continues to be highly controversial both within Tibet and worldwide. Many Tibetans and Westerners still view China's 1950 "liberation" of Tibet to be an invasion of a sovereign country, while the Chinese have viewed Tibet to be a rightful part of China for centuries; the Chinese believe that their 1950 reassertion of control in Tibet served to remove the repressive regime which kept much of the population in virtual serfdom. The remaining three-quarters of the Tibetan population is concentrated in the river region of the south. The river region is characterized by fertile mountain valleys through which flow Tibet's many rivers including the Yarlung Tsangpo River "the upper course of the Brahmaputra" and its major tributary. Tibet, the remote and mainly-Buddhist territory known as the "roof of the world", is governed as an autonomous region of China. Beijing claims a centuries-old sovereignty over the Himalayan region. But the allegiances of many Tibetans lie with the exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, seen by his followers as a living god, but by China as a separatist threat. International attention was focused on the territory in 2008 during the run-up to the Beijing Olympics. Fatal clashes between anti-Chinese protesters and the authorities in Tibet were given wide publicity and the torch relay. Situated in the southwest frontier of China, Tibet Autonomous Region covers a total area of 1,220,000 square kilometres with population of 2,770,000. Standing in the southern part of Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, the whole autonomous region overwhelmingly comprises mountain range with an average elevation of over 4,000 meters above sea level. With an average of over 4,500 meters above sea level the North Tibetan Plateau occupies two-thirds of the whole range. Basins are surrounded by hills ranging from 300 to 500 meters high, south of the North Tibetan Plateau, lying between Mountain Kailash and the