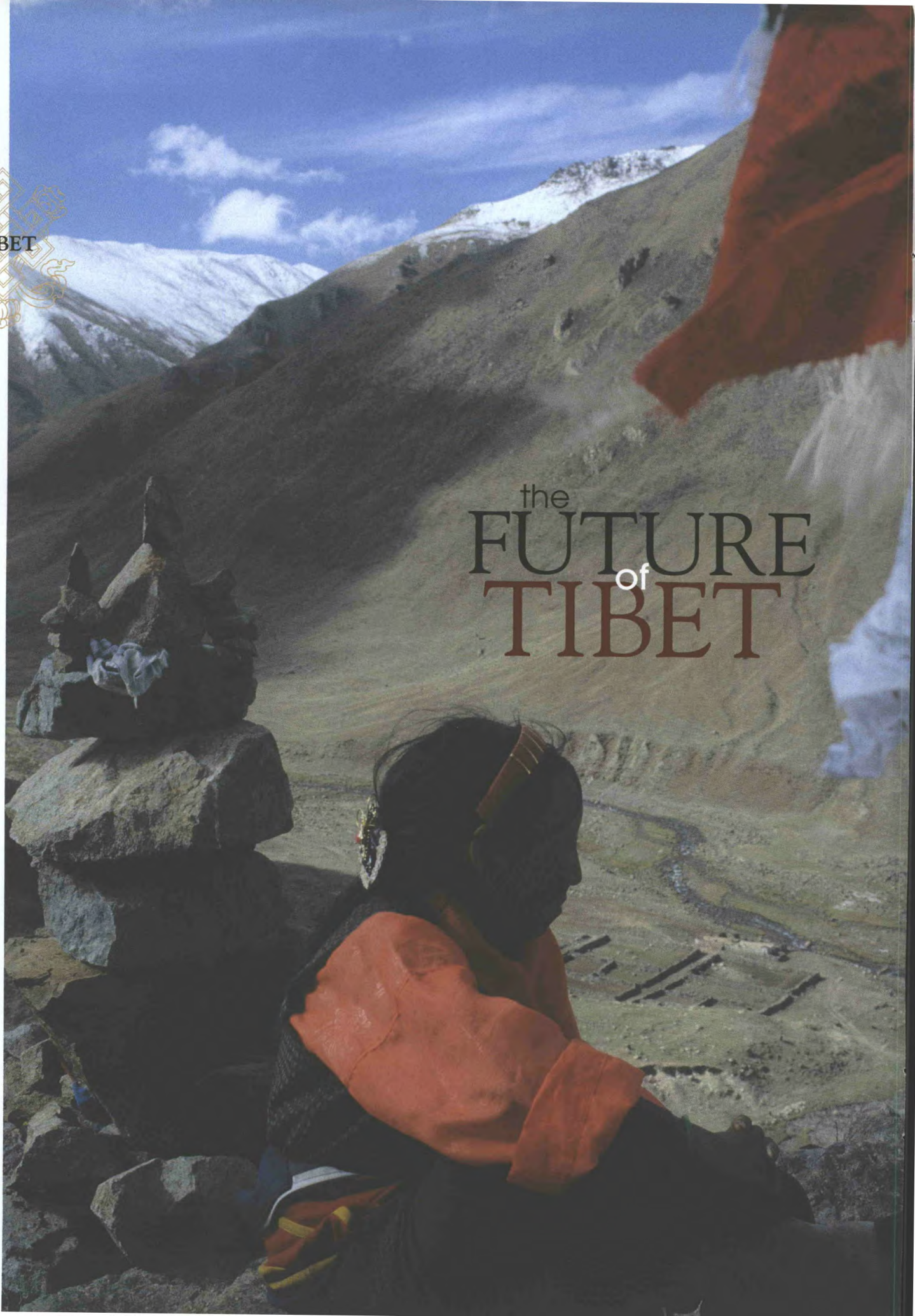




TIBET

the
FUTURE
of
TIBET



While the Chinese believe that Tibet has been part of China since the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), Tibet has a recorded history of statehood that goes back to 127 B.C. After centuries of history, studded with wars and reforms, the multitude of voices claiming opposing views reached cacophony in 1949, when Communist China invaded Tibet, forcing the young Dalai Lama, Tibet's political and spiritual leader, to flee to India in 1959. The Tibetan Government-in-Exile is based in Dharamsala.

Most Tibetans do not believe, as the Chinese maintain, that the invasion has "liberated" them from feudal serfdom. Rather, the "liberation" has resulted in the death of over 1.2 million Tibetans and the destruction of over 6,000 Tibetan monasteries and cultural centers. It is estimated that 130,000 Tibetan refugees live in exile around the world, including about 3,000 in the United States and Canada.

Today historical Tibet has been divided by the Chinese government into regions and prefectures. Well over half of Tibet's original territory has been absorbed into China proper. The Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) encompasses only the central area and some of the eastern regions.

Chinese settlers out-number Tibetans in most urban areas and many rural areas, making Tibetans a minority in their own country. Meanwhile, thousands of Tibetans continue to flee from occupied Tibet, making the treacherous journey over mountain passes and into the uncertain world of exile.

MANDALA asked prominent Tibetans in exile, a Western advocate, and a Chinese writer and intellectual how they see the future of Tibet.

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA

When one looks at the state of affairs inside Tibet locally, and the hard stand adopted by the Chinese authorities, the situation of Tibet seems extremely discouraging and hopeless. However, the future of Tibet is closely related to what happens inside China proper. China today, compared with China 15 to 20 years ago, has greatly changed. As a member of the global community, China must follow the global trend towards democracy, respect for human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, etc. Sooner or later China, too, must follow. Therefore, when I look at the overall situation and especially at the changes that are taking place in China itself, I am optimistic.

LODI GYALTSEN GYARI

My hope is that Tibet will once again become a land where the six million Tibetans can live in total freedom, according to the principles of Buddhadharma. The preservation of the Dharma is a core issue for us. The whole Tibetan civilization is built around Dharma, and the Tibetans, a Buddhist people,

have even sometimes gone to the extreme of taking up arms to preserve the Dharma – I am not saying this is the right approach, rather to stress the fact that Dharma is precious to the Tibetan people. [In recent history] it wasn't when the Chinese took away the land from the Tibetan rich, but *precisely* when the monasteries were being reduced to rubble, and when learned scholars and venerated religious leaders were being imprisoned, and in many cases executed, that the Tibetans throughout the plateau rose up and resisted.

Most important for us Tibetans is that we are able to lead our lives according to our beliefs. I certainly don't see a Tibet where every Tibetan is in some cave meditating or reciting mantras – in fact I would like Tibet to become a modernized country where its people can take full advantage of scientific and technological innovations – yet not at the cost of losing our Buddhist identity. If we lost that, and even gained so-called total political independence, this would be meaningless. His Holiness the Dalai Lama's vision for Tibet, to become a zone of *ahimsa* [the Hindu ethic of non-violence], is, I believe, both far-sighted and courageous. I understand it's a vision that has not been adopted by a fairly large segment of the Tibetan people, but my hope is for its realization.

It is also my dream that Tibet becomes a bridge between two of Asia's great civilizations: India and China. In the past Tibet acted as a buffer between these two, but as the world is changing, becoming smaller, what is needed now is not a buffer, but a bridge – a position that would suit Tibet because of its deep-rooted historical cultural relation with the people of India, and its unique and special long relationship with China, even though sometimes it is unpleasant.

It is unrealistic for Tibet to exist in isolation from China – His Holiness has envisioned the future of Tibet to be one that is really a part of the People's Republic of China, without seeking total independence. We hope that Chinese leaders, thinking of the long-term interests of their nation, will reach out to the efforts of His Holiness. I see some hope because day-by-day



Source: International Campaign for Tibet

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China is becoming much more self-confident, and less threatened or suspicious of everyone around her. [On this point] it is important that the global community accepts China into the fold of the family of nations, which must be done in a way that is sincere. I find two contradictory approaches by some of the Western nations in particular. Sometimes because of their commercial, etc., short-term interests, driven by greed, many nations are willing to give China license to do almost anything, which does China more harm than good in the long-run. On the other hand these nations continue to look at China as a threat, which is also wrong. One has to have the 'middle-way' approach.

Each year we see more young and dynamic Chinese leaders emerging, who have a far wider vision of the world. This is not good not only for China, but for us Tibetans – we can only deal with a leadership that is self-confident and sees its long-term interests. I always tell my Chinese friends whenever I have the opportunity, either formally or informally, "His Holiness the Dalai Lama is not your problem, he is your solution, and he's also our solution." I strongly believe that both the Chinese and us Tibetans must take advantage of His Holiness's presence to reach out to each other.

Thirdly, I would like to see Tibet as a sanctuary for all living beings. Due to Tibet's unique life-giving physical position – all the major rivers that nourish millions of lives throughout Asia, originate from Tibet – it is not only important for the Tibetan people, but in fact much more so for the Chinese, the Indians, Bangladeshis, for everyone living in the Mekong Delta, to join in helping Tibet become the Zone of Peace that His Holiness envisages, so on the plateau, we human beings can live in harmony with nature and other sentient beings, the beautiful nature of Tibet is maintained, and Tibet can truly become a 'giver of life.'

• Lodi G. Gyari is currently the Special Envoy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He is the lead person designated by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to commence negotiations with the Chinese Government. Mr. Gyari is also the Executive Chairman of the Board of the International Campaign for Tibet, an independent Washington, DC based human rights advocacy group.



Lodi Gyari

scenario where the gradual dawning of greater freedoms and democracy among the Chinese could lead to increased accommodation of the political and cultural needs of the Tibetan people.

If China continues its present course, we can be sure that it will become a powerful economic and military power in the coming decades – a "successful" state on the lines of Singapore, but much more menacing and dangerous to its neighbors and the world with a billion people under strict subjugation. In such a climate, Tibet as a cultural and political entity will surely die a slow death, and all that will remain of Tibet will be our projections and imaginations.

But even under the worst of these scenarios, Tibet could still occupy a powerful place in our minds because of its history and its spiritual legacy. The Tibetan contribution to the preservation and application of Buddhist ideas and practices, and the literary effort of tremendous depth and scale will stand as significant and inspiring endeavors. Such a Tibet is not just imagined, but rooted in the reality of the Tibetan experience of over 1,300 years, dedicated and sustained by the effort of individuals and society at large at personal transformation and enlightenment in the midst of human chaos and survival. And despite all our frailties and failings, the Tibetans, it could be said, took on the idea of transformation and enlightenment to have meaning and purpose beyond just the individual, or even their own society, but to extend it to all sentient beings throughout universe.

But, on a more positive note, we can imagine a future Tibet that can be even more impressive and relevant than just an idea. Despite the immense suffering and destruction in Tibet, and the continuing sorry state of affairs, we can look at the unresolved situation as one of hope and opportunity. The Tibetans, in exile or under subjugation, have shown that peoples and communities can move beyond mere survival to realizing their fuller potential and unique roles even under limiting circumstances, and that the powerful can be successfully challenged through non-violent means.

We can also make a modest claim for affirming the relevance of spirituality in these times, resisting the total subjugation of the human spirit by technology and matter. Many Tibetan communities and institutions in exile are real examples of this attempt at balancing the inner and other worlds. If Tibet is to be free soon and the larger community is embraced by this traditional and now globally influenced culture of spirit and matter, how could we not envision a saner and more peaceful world.

• Tenzin Tethong is chairman of the Committee of 100 for Tibet, former representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in New York and Washington, DC, and founder of the Tibet Fund, Tibet House-New York, and the International Campaign for Tibet.

TENZIN N. TETHONG

Depending on the unpredictable flow of politics in China, the future of Tibet could go into any extreme direction – from continued subjugation leading to the eventual death of a people and a culture, to instant freedom in the wake of a dramatic Soviet-style breakdown of grand proportions. There could even be a more middle-of-the-road



Tenzin Tethong

THUPTEN JINPA

The Tibetan people are today the custodians of one of the last surviving ancient spiritual cultures of the world. This culture, founded on values and insights of compassion, the recognition of the principle of interdependence, and respect for

the natural world, represents a most profound understanding of the human condition.

It is my sincere hope that we, the people of Tibet, both inside the country living under the Chinese occupation and in the exile communities outside, will have the wisdom and courage to preserve this veritable jewel of humankind during what is perhaps the most challenging and darkest period in its long history.

❁ Thupten Jinpa is a Cambridge-educated Geshe Lharampa and principal interpreter to His Holiness the Dalai Lama since 1986.

WANG LIXIONG

I am not religious. Generally speaking, my view of the future of Tibet, China and of humanity is pessimistic – a pessimism which is based on current reality, and its logical progression.

An agnostic can still harbor hopes, however, that religion can change the tragic future of humanity, and to give meaning to one's life. If religion could have such an effect on the future, it is my heartfelt belief that Tibetan Buddhism would definitely be one of its major forces. Interestingly enough, the biggest group of people that Tibetan Buddhism could help would be the Chinese people, who have given the Tibetans the most pain and misery. Thinking about this, I can feel the ocean-like compassion of the Buddha, and understand the bodhisattva spirit, which causes one personally to go down to hell to liberate the beings suffering there.

❁ Wang Lixiong is a prominent Beijing-based writer and intellectual, who has become the most vocal critic of China's Tibet policy to emerge in recent years. In his article, *The Dalai Lama is the Key to the Tibet Problem*, Wang contends that China's Tibet policy over the past two decades has been a failure, and the only way forward now is to open negotiations with the Dalai Lama. Wang's books include, *Yellow Peril*, *Sky Burial: The Fate of Tibet*, and his latest, *Conversation with the Dalai Lama*.

WARREN W. SMITH

I think the Chinese have their own plans for the future of Tibet. Like the European colonization of especially the Western United States, they think they have some kind of manifest destiny to populate Western China. The people [living] there will then either be marginalized or assimilated. If left up to the Chinese, Tibetan national identity will be eradicated.

For Tibetans, self-determination is one possibility. Everyone knows self-determination means independence although a government is able to advocate it because it means that people decide for themselves. If US-China relationship deteriorates – a pretty good possibility given our ideological and cultural differences – the US government could be much more supportive of the Tibetan right to self-determination, as it was in the 1950s and 60s when we were opposed to the Communist government in China.

I don't think autonomy is capable of preserving national identity. The Chinese might promise some kind of autonomy –



Wang Lixiong meets with His Holiness the Dalai Lama

they promised considerable rights of autonomy in the 17-Point Agreement in 1951 – but they delivered on none of them. They could do the same again. They won't allow any kind of collective autonomy, although there may be limited individual freedom as long as individuals are cooperative with them. But Tibetans will never be allowed to say anything about independence – past, present or future – or about their loyalty to the Dalai Lama.

As any perpetuation of Tibetan separateness – Tibetan culture, autonomy, national identity – is considered a threat to China, I don't think they will talk to the Dalai Lama about the political status in Tibet. First of all to negotiate with him, they have to accept there is an issue – that there's some uncertainty about Tibet's political status that wasn't resolved in 1950 – and they can never admit that. If they did admit that Tibet was independent before 1950, then they are admitting they were imperialists.

I think the Chinese have found that their combination of repression, economic development, and colonization is working. They've mounted a virulent anti-Dalai Lama campaign because they don't think they need him; they've decided that they don't really need to win the hearts and minds of Tibetans, except for a few collaborators, and that they can control the situation. The evidence would seem to support that; demonstrations have decreased because the repression is so severe; some Tibetans have been bought off with economic development, others have been marginalized and the ultimate solution is colonization. I think the Chinese are satisfied with their policy, so why negotiate?

Their Panchen Lama is a model for a Chinese Dalai Lama – and the only thing they'll have to deal with is that there will be two Dalai Lamas – one in China and one in exile. They will demand that every foreign ambassador and every foreign delegation meet with their Dalai Lama and all countries of the world will find it very difficult to resist this demand if they want to maintain good relations with China.

❁ Warren W. Smith has a PhD in international relations from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. He is the author of *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations*. He is currently Research Historian with the Tibetan Service of Radio Free Asia in Washington, DC.