

Tibet – Falsehoods From the BBC

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Post-Truthful BBC News

Back in the 1970s, BBC News was respected globally for its fairness and willingness to mention inconvenient facts. But the Thatcherites, not content with support from the rich owners of most newspapers, started howling about 'leftist bias'.

By stages, they broke the will of what had been an admirably fair news service. It began presenting the world as the Tories wanted it seen. And then New Labour took just the same view, dumping Labour traditions in the hope of power.

The global respect for BBC News drained away. Dramas and fictions are still high quality. But for news, it is just another national news service with a very partisan view. An immensely valuable British asset was lost.

The new package includes many anti-China views Including being endlessly misleading about Tibet:

"China, which annexed Tibet in the 1950s, regards the Dalai Lama as a separatist.

It says it has the right to choose his successor"

(<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/cq6mmq703ryt>).

Three falsehoods in one paragraph.

I say 'falsehood' rather than lie, to allow for it maybe being just sloppy research. It's what you'd get from the mostly-reliable Wikipedia, because they too have allowed falsehoods to prevail.

In detail, what's wrong is:

1) Calling China's reunification of China an annexation when applied to Eastern Tibet, the Tibetan plateau. It was never a separate sovereign entity. When Imperial China was brought into the Western system of International Diplomacy, Eastern Tibet was an autonomous region. Never recognised as a separate sovereign entity. No authorised international body ever denied that it was ultimately under Central Government control. Even the

self-appointed International Commission of Jurists never denied it was part of China: they just selectively condemned China for asserting power over separatists in an entirely standard manner.

2) It says that China ‘*claims that the Dalai Lama supported separatism*’. That’s like saying that anti-racists ‘*claim that General Robert E. Lee fought for the Confederacy*’, or that fans ‘*claim that Marilyn Monroe was a famous Hollywood actress*’. It is a trick to create doubt about something that no serious source would dispute. It stops short of outright lying, but I see the difference as unreal.

The current Dalai Lama was installed with Central Government support, as I detail later. He was chosen from several rival candidates, and was excused the test of the Golden Urn. But in 1949 he was part of a claim to independence made by the Lhasa government. They did this when it became clear that the Chinese Communists would be the next Central Government.

When the Central Government sent in an army, he compromised and even accepted a position as a high official for all China:

“In September 1954, he went to the Chinese capital to meet Chairman Mao Zedong with the 10th Panchen Lama and attend the first session of the National People's Congress as a delegate, primarily discussing China's constitution.[90][91] On 27 September 1954, the Dalai Lama was selected as a Vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress,[92][93] a post he officially held until 1964.”
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/14th_Dalai_Lama#Cooperation_and_conflicts_with_the_People's_Republic_of_China)

Then fled or was abducted after a 1959 rebellion, and in exile claimed independence again. And finally dropped this when the USA normalised relations in the 1970s: but then refused a sensible compromise when it was reportedly offered.

3) The BBC endorses the idea of a new Dalai Lama without Central Government approval as *traditional*. It never has been. The line of monks became rulers in Lhasa with the support of outside powers. Initially a faction of Mongols in the chaos after the Ming Dynasty fell, and the 4th ‘incarnation’ just happened to be from a Mongol ruling family. But the system was taken over by the Manchu rulers of Imperial China, with the Mongol ‘incarnation’ conveniently dying young.

Manchu rule was loose. It took a year to get from Beijing to Lhasa. But Emperors also appointed officials called Ambans who had to be consulted by whoever was ruling on behalf of the Dalai Lama – most did not actually rule. This was different from Korea and Vietnam, whose status was more a matter of mutual politeness and harmonious trade than actual control. Yet those links were still ambiguous enough that China was forced to sign treaties breaking the link after military defeats by first Imperial France and later on Imperial Japan.

People’s China took from the Bolsheviks a view of nations as historic accidents, and often defined by conquest and oppression. So territories taken by the West’s Unequal Treaties were accepted as lost. Likewise Mao confirmed an acceptance of the legality of the Mongolian People’s Republic in 1949. Chiang Kai-shek had earlier conceded it in negotiations with Stalin and then reneged. The global community only gave Mongolia general recognition and UN membership in 1960. Of course China itself only got its rightful UN seat in 1971, after Nixon dropped the absurd claim that the Taiwan exiles were the real China.

Shysterism the Norm in International Law

Unlike most left-wingers, I don’t complain about International Law being broken. I insist that it never was actually real. I explained in a blog called *Secession and Ineffective Law* how little it was ever actually honoured. (<https://mrgwydionmwilliams.quora.com/Secession-and-Ineffective-Law>.)

There's no honest basis on which you can say that India can keep its half of Kashmir, but China must abandon the western half of Greater Tibet. Myself, I’d say I prefer peace to justice. That I wish everyone could live with the *status quo*. But that a separate West Tibet might have been as much a mess as Nepal before an internal Maoist rebellion destroyed its old corrupt politics.

I also notice that the BBC reports are confused about what ‘Tibet’ actually is. The name

came to Europe via the Islamic World. In Tibetan it is Bod for Greater Tibet and U-Tsang for Central Tibet, also known as Western Tibet, but the British called it Outer Tibet with the mixed areas as Inner Tibet. Chinese used to say ‘Tibet’ when speaking in English, but now prefer Xizang, its name in Standard Chinese. But ‘Tibet’ gets applied in a confusing way both to the Tibetan Plateau and to ethnically mixed regions

“The bulk of western and central Tibet (U-Tsang) was often at least nominally unified under a series of Tibetan governments in Lhasa, Shigatse, or nearby locations. The eastern regions of Kham and Amdo often maintained a more decentralized indigenous political structure, being divided among a number of small principalities and tribal groups, while also often falling under Chinese rule; most of this area was eventually annexed into the Chinese provinces of Sichuan and Qinghai. The current borders of Tibet were generally established in the 18th century after an imperial edict from the Emperor Kangxi was published for the Imperial Stele Inscriptions of the Pacification of Tibet in 1720 AD.”
(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tibet>.)

Saying ‘annexed’ is part of the bias that fans of the Dalai Lama’s fantasy vision of Tibet have inflicted upon this useful source. Emperors can reorganise what they already rule, unless there is some specific pledge for autonomy or special rights. The split within regions with a Tibetan population was a basic fact of history.

The Chinese themselves recently explained how they tried to handle it back in the 1950s:

“How Deng Xiaoping’s ‘one country, two systems’ dates back to 1957 in Tibet...”

“For centuries, Tibet was China’s Gordian knot. Its extreme climate, high altitude and unique sociopolitical conditions made administration arduous. Yet, it is critical to China’s stability and security.

“Various emperors tried to adopt the so-called patron-priest approach, providing material and military support to Lhasa in exchange for its loyalty and religious influence. However, at the turn of the 18th century, continuous internal strife in the region and the threat of Nepalese invasions forced Beijing’s hand.

“The Qianlong emperor ordered a reorganisation of the Tibetan administration and codified it into the imperial decree. It formalised the selection of top lamas like the Dalai and the Panchen through a lottery in a golden urn under the supervision of Qing officials. This was a symbolic gesture to position Beijing as the final arbiter of power succession in Tibet.

“The ordinance also elevated ambans – equivalent to the central government’s liaison office directors today – to the same level of political authority as the Dalai Lama. Beijing would control Tibet’s foreign and military affairs but otherwise allow the region to maintain its unique social, religious and political systems. It required Tibet to reform its systems gradually without stipulating deadlines. Tibet was not absorbed into China as another province, but it was also not a simple tributary state like Vietnam.

“Even at the height of the Communist Party’s triumph, Mao and Deng were mindful of the vast differences between Tibet and inner China. While they were adamant that Tibet must be part of China, they were also willing to be flexible and patient with its peculiar systems.

“On September 4, 1956, Beijing decided to pause socialist reforms in Tibet for ‘six years’. However, similar programmes continued in other Tibetan-populated regions in Sichuan, Yunnan and Qinghai. Deng argued that conditions on the ground were not ripe for introducing radical changes. Even though the priest-god political system and the social reality of serfdom in Tibet were an affront to the Communists’ atheist doctrines, Mao and

Deng were willing to wait.

“The meeting minutes of the secretariat of the Chinese Communist Party at the time showed that the leaders had even discussed letting Tibet keep its systems unchanged for ‘50 years’.

“Yet, the Tibetan elite rejected the olive branch and decided that time was not on their side. Tensions escalated and culminated in an armed revolt in Lhasa in 1959. Suspecting involvement from the United States, Chinese leaders quickly set aside their waiting strategy and responded with swift military action, resulting in the exile of the 14th Dalai Lama till this day.” (<https://www.scmp.com/opinion/china-opinion/article/3276947/how-deng-xiaopings-one-country-two-systems-dates-back-1957-tibet>.)

Eastern Tibet was never a single entity: it was Kham and Amdo. These had large ethnic-Tibetan population, but also many Han Chinese and also Hui, Chinese Muslims with a culture close to the Han. The Central Government split these mixed regions into several Chinese provinces. And like most of the rest of China, these were ruled by a number of rival warlords during the four decades of the Western-style Chinese Republic.

Kham before 1949 had a strong bandit tradition. I wrote of this in a review of a falsification from 1997: the Hollywood film of former SS-member Heinrich Harrer’s *Seven Years In Tibet*:

“[The film has] a dramatic encounter with unnamed Tibetan bandits. Harrer’s own account is very different: a series of alarming but inconclusive meetings with people he calls ‘Khampas’

“‘Khampa’ must mean an inhabitant of the eastern province of Tibet, which is called Kham. But you never heard the name mentioned without an undertone of fear and warning. At last we realised that the word was synonymous with ‘robber’.” (*Seven Years In Tibet*, towards the end of chapter 5.)

“Harrer was writing in 1953. Khampas fighting the Chinese Red Army were later defined as warriors of freedom rather than bandits objecting to being put out of business. Had Italy gone Communist [in the 1940s], the Sicilian Mafia and its allies in the Camorra and ‘Ndrangheta might have done something similar – and there was a brief and insignificant attempt at Sicilian separatism using bandits for firepower.” (<https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/m99-topic-menus-from-long-revolution-website/42-china/tibet/falsehoods-in-seven-years-in-tibet/>)

The 1959 uprising was caused by the Central Government doing basic social reforms in East Tibet, which had never been legally autonomous. Some discontent Khampas moved to Lhasa and started a revolt. Sparked panic with a bizarre claim that a Tibetan monk positive about the Central Government was intending to assassinate the Dalai Lama, who at that time was very useful to Mao.

I also remember something about the Dalai Lama saying he had been kidnapped by what he called ‘reactionary forces’. I think it was mentioned in books from the 1960s, including works published as written by the Dalai Lama himself. Useful work could be done by someone with access to a Copywrite Library: I myself have other stuff to do.

The Dalai Lama seems to think that everyone Tibetan is under his authority. There was never any basis for that. Even in Eastern Tibet, it was always shared. Always dependent on outside contenders in the wider Chinese civilization-state.

Shangri-La – a non-Tibetan Fantasy

The Dalai Lama’s people have gained greatly from association with the charming legend of Shangri-La. But not so charming if you read James Hilton’s original book. It is out of copyright, meaning you can read it on-line at <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks05/0500141h.html>. I’d read it as a conventional book, and summarised my views as follows:

“Even though the Shangri-la of James Hilton’s *Lost Horizon* was based on Tibetan

legends of Shambhala, his actual vision was very different and thoroughly racist. The long-lived elite were almost all of European origin.”

This is explained by a suitably humble and respectful Chinese man who is a postulant at the lamasery who speaks English:

“Chang replied: ‘Those of us in full lamahood number about fifty, and there are a few others, like myself, who have not yet attained to complete initiation. We shall do so in due course, it is to be hoped. Till then we are half-lamas, postulants, you might say. As for our racial origins, there are representatives of a great many nations among us, though it is perhaps natural that Tibetans and Chinese make up the majority’...

“In general we have found that Tibetans, owing to their being inured to both the altitude and other conditions, are much less sensitive than outside races; they are charming people, and we have admitted many of them, but I doubt if more than a few will pass their hundredth year. The Chinese are a little better, but even among them we have a high percentage of failures. Our best subjects, undoubtedly, are the Nordic and Latin races of Europe; perhaps the Americans would be equally adaptable, and I count it our great good fortune that we have at last, in the person of one of your companions, secured a citizen of that nation.

“This was a backward-looking vision even for 1933, a typical white-male fantasy at many levels:

“Until we reach an age when care is advisable, we gladly accept the pleasures of the table, while—for the benefit of our younger colleagues—the women of the valley have happily applied the principle of moderation to their own chastity.”

“The creed of the elite is not Buddhist and the ‘common people’ are a mix of Tibetans and Han:

“The inhabitants seemed to him a very successful blend of Chinese and Tibetan; they were cleaner and handsomer than the average of either race.”

“The real-world model for Hilton’s fantasy-novel is disputed, but the most popular location is the portion of Eastern Tibet that is now part of Yunnan. The mixed population with a large Han element would support such a location, a region that had not been ruled from Lhasa since the fall of the Tibetan Kingdom more than a thousand years ago.”

<https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/m99-topic-menus-from-long-revolution-website/42-china/tibet/why-the-west-should-not-be-encouraging-tibetan-separatism/>

But as well as racism, Hilton had good reason for keeping his private utopia distinct from the real Tibet. I’ve written a lot on the topic:

“A recent book about the British incursion into the core of Tibet says the following:

“By the start of the nineteenth century Tibet was trapped in a cycle of social and economic stagnation from which there seemed no escape. Nearly every acre of cultivable land, pasture land and forest, as well as most of the livestock, was in the hands of Tibet’s thirty or so aristocratic families and the monastic orders. Each noble family had allied itself to one or more of the larger monasteries, and both parties became ever more interlocked, powerful and wealth....

“At the time of the Younghusband Mission, Drepung Gompa was the mightiest of Tibet’s two and a half thousand monasteries, and, with a population of monks rumoured to approach ten thousand, probably the largest monastery in the world... it owned one hundred and eighty-five manors and three hundred pasture-lands, together with a workforce of more than twenty thousand peasants and sixteen thousand herdsmen. These

were all serfs, who made up the bulk of Tibet's population, at that time amounting to anywhere between one and two million souls. The serf possessed little or no land or livestock of their own, provided unpaid corvée labour to the landowners, and were taxed on whatever they managed to produce for themselves. An unknown but significant number of the peasantry were bonded slaves and, according to the harsh legal codes of the time, their lives were valued at the price of a straw rope; they could be sold or punished at will by their owners, and they had to pay hefty redemption fees if they wished to marry or secure their freedom...

“For the peasantry quite as much as for the clergy, the Buddhist faith, coupled with an unshakable belief in the power of the spirit-forces of nature, was their great consolation. Their devotion to Chos [Buddhist Dharma or Law] was absolute, it gave them hope, brought meaning to their lives, even helped to shape the national character of a people who were in general cheerful, good-humoured, patient, tolerant and fatalistic, with no desire to change or improve their lot. Whatever their present situation, it was of their own making, for every being on Earth was trapped by its particular weaknesses and delusions into an endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth.’

“Allen, Charles. *Duel in the Snows: The True Story of the Younghusband Mission to Lhasa*. John Murray 2004. Pages 58-60

“I quoted this in my study of Tibet's history, and commented

“To the British in India, a place like Tibet was crying out for them to take it over. The Chinese Empire itself was in decline. At the time, it would have seemed destined to be split between Europe's rival world-empires.” (<https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/m99-topic-menus-from-long-revolution-website/42-china/tibet/how-tibet-emerged-within-the-chinese-empire/>.)

Also:

“A physical decline and an intensification of religion can feed off of each other and make things worse. Spain got more intensely religious as its 16th century grandeur faded away. The exact beliefs of the creators of Easter Island's famous statues are unknown, but they may have been seeking extra 'Divine Favour' as life got harder thanks to their own destruction of the island's trees – it had once been forested and the trees helped preserve the soil. The logic behind Stonehenge is utterly unknown, but it and other neolithic monuments are located in areas where a prosperous agriculture existed for some centuries, but then exhausted the soil. The USA's current growth in anti-tax populism and Christian 'Fundamentalism' may well be another example of devout people finding exactly the wrong answer to material decline, but keeping themselves cheerful in the face of a worsening world.” (Ibid.)

I see the current US enthusiasm for Trump's anti-state and anti-tax policies as very much fitting this pattern. And the opposition to Trump is mostly incoherent. Bill Clinton, Obama, and Biden were merely liberal versions of the same nonsense

Tibetan Buddhism was a decayed version of an ancient faith. I'll say more on this later, when I come to talk about the Dalai Lama tradition, and the odd version of Buddhism that it grew out of.

The Lhasa Government in a Fragmented China

In 1911, the modern military that Imperial China had allowed in its last days staged a major revolt. It gets commemorated as the 1911 Revolution, but in fact it was not until 1912 that the Imperial Government stepped down. And what followed was a mess, with a corrupt general trying to make himself a new Emperor while nominally President of the Chinese Republic. Various provinces then denied that the government in the old capital of Beijing was legitimate. The country fragmented, as was always sadly likely.

In a study of the period, separate from my work on Tibet, I said:

“China’s ‘Blue Republic’ lasted from 1912 to 1949, and achieved nothing.

“It achieved nothing because it was trying to erect a copy of the complex political structures of the USA or Western Europe on top of a society that had very different value. And doing it with a false understanding of the intricate political processes that had occurred there.

“China faced the extra problem that Europe’s global Empires wanted either to carve up China between them, or else keep it as a weak state that they could make money out of. It would have needed boldness and a willingness to suffer in order to force those countries to accept China as an equal, particularly since almost all of them viewed Chinese as an inferior race. It was not impossible: Mustafa Kemal Ataturk had managed it with a vigorous Turkish Republic that replaced the decaying Ottoman Empire. But no one before Mao actually managed it.” (“China’s Blue Republic (1912-49)

<https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/problems-magazine-past-issues/why-chinas-blue-republic-achived-nothing/>).

The Soviet Union helped the Kuomintang achieve a kind of unification in 1927. Sadly, Chiang Kai-shek lacked the guts to confront Global Imperialism when internal rebels organised by the Chinese Communists handed him Shanghai. As orthodox Marxists, the Communists assumed that China must have a long period of development of capitalism under the home-grown bourgeoisie. But they weren’t up to it; Chiang was doing what most of them wanted when he massacred many Communists and ceased to be a serious radical. He never did get full control – northern warlords who had never been more than nominally obedient made their own deals when Mao’s forces after 1945 were clearly winning the war. They got nice jobs with no real power, and they anyway could see that Mao was delivering what they most wanted: a unified China. But the government in Lhasa took a different line.

“In 1949, seeing that the Communists were gaining control of China, the Kashag expelled all Chinese connected with the Chinese government, over the protests of both the Kuomintang and the Communists. Tibet was its own de facto country before 1951. but both the Republic of China (ROC) and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) have maintained China’s claim to sovereignty over Tibet.”

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Tibet_\(1950%E2%80%93present\)#1950%E2%80%931955:_Traditional_systems](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Tibet_(1950%E2%80%93present)#1950%E2%80%931955:_Traditional_systems)).

Once again, the Wiki has been given tricky wording by pro-Dalai ‘Edit Warriors’. The Tibetan Plateau under the Manchu dynasty had been autonomous, but not a sovereign state. The 13th Dalai Lama had tried getting legal secession, but no one would recognise it. And when he died, there were problems getting a successor. The need to find a child who was supposedly the same man reborn:

"Lhamo Thondup [the current Dalai Lama] was born on 6 July 1935 to a farming and horse trading family ... at the edge of the traditional Tibetan region of Amdo in what is today Qinghai Province...

"He was one of seven siblings to survive childhood and one of the three supposed reincarnated Rinpoches in the same family... His eldest brother, Thupten Jigme Norbu, had been recognised at the age of three by the 13th Dalai Lama as the reincarnation of the high Lama, the 6th Taktser Rinpoche." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/14th_Dalai_Lama#Early_life_and_background.)

This account gives details of the involvement of a Muslim warlord called Ma Bufang, who was loosely loyal to the Central Government. But it omits the equally important involvement of the Central Government in getting this candidate accepted without being tested against rivals using the Golden Urn. There is no excuse for not knowing this: plenty of neutral sources mention it, and I quote some later. But in this, the Wiki has been turned into propaganda.

It has neatly demonstrated that the libertarian model is mostly worse than what was

delivered by Classical Liberalism when it thought it was winning the world. You can be post-truthful: start your own myth and hope it becomes real. But this almost always fails. And the *entirely non-traditional* attempt to make the Dalai Lama significant was never more than a way of harassing China. Sacrificing no-hopers by using their ignorance to make them incidental cannon-fodder in a wider struggle.

Several years back, I did a long study of how the various Tibetan populations within China were actually governed. I said:

“Britain was against breaking up China and splitting it between the various European powers. Even after they showed its weakness in the First Opium War, the aim was to dominate the state rather than take it over or hack chunks off of it. The Younghusband Expedition showed that Lhasa could be occupied, but to annex a huge chunk of the Chinese Empire was another matter and the British Empire was not ready for it...

“A more productive line was to say that the central Chinese government did not have full control, had ‘suzerainty’ rather than proper sovereignty. This was the view that British experts seem to have transmitted to the [1911 edition of the] Encyclopaedia Britannica, which summarised it thus:

“‘Though the whole of Tibet is under the suzerainty of China, the government of the country is divided into two distinct administrations, the one under the rule of the Dalai lama of Lhasa, the other under local kings or chiefs, and comprising a number of ecclesiastical fiefs. Both are directed and controlled by the high Chinese officials residing at Lhasa, Sining Fu; and the capital of the Chinese province of Szechuen [Sichuan].’ (*The Complex Creation of Tibet*, <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/m99-topic-menus-from-long-revolution-website/42-china/tibet/how-tibet-emerged-within-the-chinese-empire/>.)

Only later did supporters of Tibetan independence cook up the notion that these officials were not really Chinese. They were not Han, who were viewed as inferior under the Manchu dynasty. But they were part of Imperial China, which Manchu had made themselves dominant within. ‘Manchu’ was in fact a new identity: a fusion of Jurchens with selected groups of Mongols and selected groups of Han who had settled in Jurchen territory and were loyal to them. One of many groups with their own customs, but believers in the ancient civilisation-state that China was across several thousand years. Mulan is almost certainly fiction: her story is not mentioned in accounts of various heroic women written well after she supposedly lived. But she is clearly one of these minorities, and real female examples must have existed. Real male equivalents are everywhere in confirmed history, just as the British Empire had a diversity of supporters until the selfish greed of a racist elite lost their respect.

In the 1911 dictionary, as in the original 1933 fiction about Shangri-La, Tibetans were viewed as inferior to the core members of Imperial China:

“‘The British armed mission of 1904 performed a brilliant feat of marching and reached Lhasa, whose mysteries were thus unveiled...

“‘Previous to the 7th century A.D. there was no indigenous recorded history of the country, the people being steeped in barbarism and devoid of any written language. The little that is known of this prehistoric period is gathered from the legends and the more trustworthy sidelights of contemporary Chinese records’...

“This is probably unfair to Tibet, which had a rich local culture, though no known writing or non-legendary history before it became involved with the Chinese Empire...

“The actual value of the Tibetan Plateau to Britain was doubtful. A more reasonable target for the British Raj was to secure a relatively small but much more densely populated territory that was on the Hindu side of the high mountains, yet ethnically

and traditionally linked to Tibet. Various known as 'South Tibet' or the 'North-East Frontier Agency', the British Raj tried to obtain title to it by the Simla Convention of 1914. The Dalai Lama agreed, but the government of the weak Chinese Republic rejected the whole Simla Convention. The British Raj left this territory alone at the time, and it was not marked as part of British India. But newly independent India took it over, and it has ended up as the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, yet still claimed by China." (Ibid.)

There is a widespread belief that China would abandon its claim if India would drop its claim to an uninhabitable territory called the Aksai Chin. This itself is next to Kashmir, disputed between India and Pakistan, and likely to choose either Pakistan or independence if it had a free choice. And Pakistan has accepted China's definition of the border for land currently held by India. But India seems intent on taking or keeping every last kilometre, whereas China has resolved many other border disputes with a compromise.

The Republic of India, supposed grand example of tolerance and peace, has been notably bad at compromising with anyone else's notion of where the border between two sovereign states should properly be.

Secession – a Legal Grey Area

I'm a believer in the Bolshevik notion that nations and nationality are an accident. The aim for as long as the Soviet Union lasted was a World State that would erode such things, though in its final decades the Soviets became increasingly Russian Nationalist. But the initial and sound idea was to go with the greatest number.

The Chinese Communists inherited this tradition. They made arrangements that keeps most of their fifty-six recognised nationalities peaceful. A contrast to India, where there are all sorts of conflicts that the outside world barely hears of.

They also accept that for the time being, we have a world of sovereign states. The USA failed to be either fair or competent in running such a system, so China formed BRICS to ease them out of power.

Liberals favour nationalism, but are surprised when it works against them. Liberals within each nationality have an attitude that *this land is ours, even if we are a minority*. Just this is said within a 2025 Hindu thriller called *Ground Zero*. Kashmir is an integral part of Hindu-dominated India, even if it happens to be full of Muslims who'd sooner it was something else.

I've written and blogged a lot about the matter. For instance:

"Between any two sovereign states, the only reality is Power Politics.

"Also true when a region within a sovereign state has a local majority who'd like to secede.

"And it's common for both sides in secession struggles to claim that International Law is on their side.

"To have this repeated with great vehemence by their power-political friends.

"The USA is a particular offender. Secession was a right for Kosovo and forbidden for Crimea. And it was even forbidden for the majority-Serb regions in the north of Kosovo, where there is continuing trouble...

"Why the refusal to let Crimea upgrade its status to sovereign, and an insistence that Kosovo can do this and even take majority-Serb regions with it?

"Is this some strange error in the system of International Law?

"No, it is the system.

“Superior Enforceable International Law was never a reality. Codes are set out and called laws, but often remain ‘dead letter’. And never enforceable unless someone powerful finds them a convenient pretext.” (*Secession and Ineffective Law*, <https://mrgwydionmwilliams.quora.com/Secession-and-Ineffective-Law>.)

India has a subversion law that punishes anyone calling for secession of any part of its territory, even by peaceful means. But predictably, India shows no consistency when it comes to foreign states. They waged a successful war after the UN was ineffective over the dispute between what was then West and East Pakistan:

“Though the United Nations condemned the human rights violations during and following Operation Searchlight, it failed to defuse the situation politically before the start of the war...

“After India entered the war, Pakistan, fearing certain defeat, made urgent appeals to the United Nations to intervene and force India to agree to a ceasefire. The UN Security Council assembled on 4 December 1971 to discuss the hostilities in South Asia. After lengthy discussions on 7 December, the United States made a resolution for ‘immediate cease-fire and withdrawal of troops’. While supported by the majority, the USSR vetoed the resolution twice. In light of the Pakistani atrocities against Bengalis, the United Kingdom and France abstained on the resolution...

“Most UN member nations were quick to recognize Bangladesh within months of its independence.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladesh_Liberation_War#International_reactions.)

“Operation Searchlight was a military operation carried out by the Pakistan Army in an effort to curb the Bengali nationalist movement in former East Pakistan in March 1971. Pakistan retrospectively justified the operation on the basis of anti-Bihari violence carried out en masse by the Bengalis earlier that month. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Searchlight.)

Biharis are a distinct Indian community. Most are Hindus, but a Muslim minority moved to both West Pakistan and East Pakistan during the partition of India in 1947.

Bangladesh was bad news for them. And that's why I view such things as human tragedies, rather than Transcendental Justice either achieved or thwarted.

Annexation

Annexation is when an existing state asserts ownership of territory that it did not previously claim. It is part of world history, though the UN aspired to end it.

Conquest of a would-be secessionist state is not annexation. Particular cases might be morally worse, but the two are very definitely not the same.

China's Central Government never abandoned its legal authority over the self-governing territory ruled from Lhasa.

By contrast the Indian subcontinent was many rival states when Britain's East India Company began conquering it. During the heyday of the British Empire, much of it was not technically ruled by the authorities appointed from London, though in practice they dominated it. And the British rulers of India left things ambiguous when it became clear that they had to accept independence.

“Prior to Indian independence, Jawaharlal Nehru, as the Vice-President of the Executive Council, pushed through a resolution in the Indian Constituent Assembly to the effect that Sikkim and Bhutan, as Himalayan states, were not ‘Indian states’ and their future should be negotiated separately.

“In 1975, the Prime Minister of Sikkim Kazi Lhendup Dorjee, appealed to the

Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi for Sikkim to become a state of India. In April of that year, the Indian Army took over the city of Gangtok and disarmed the Chogyal's palace guards. Thereafter, a referendum was held in which 97.5 per cent of voters supported abolishing the monarchy, effectively approving union with India. India is said to have stationed 20,000–40,000 troops in a country of only 200,000 during the referendum.”

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikkim#Indian_protectorate.)

“The Annexation of Goa was the process in which the Republic of India annexed the Portuguese State of India, the then Portuguese Indian territories of Goa, Daman and Diu, starting with the armed action carried out by the Indian Armed Forces in December 1961. In India, this action is referred to as the ‘Liberation of Goa’. In Portugal, it is referred to as the ‘Invasion of Goa’. Jawaharlal Nehru had hoped that the popular movement in Goa and the pressure of world public opinion would force the Portuguese Goan authorities to grant it independence, but without success; consequently, Krishna Menon suggested taking Goa by force.

“The operation was codenamed Operation Vijay (meaning ‘Victory’ in Sanskrit) by the Indian Armed Forces. It involved air, sea and land strikes for over 36 hours, and was a decisive victory for India, ending 451 years of rule by Portugal over its remaining exclaves in India. The engagement lasted two days, and twenty-two Indians and thirty Portuguese were killed in the fighting. The brief conflict drew a mixture of worldwide praise and condemnation. In India, the action was seen as a liberation of historically Indian territory, while Portugal viewed it as an aggression against its national soil and citizens. Justifying the successful military action, Nehru remarked that the ‘Portuguese ultimately left no choice open to us.’ (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annexation_of_Goa.)

“The Annexation of Hyderabad (code-named Operation Polo) was a military operation launched in September 1948 that resulted in the annexation of the princely state of Hyderabad by India, which was dubbed a ‘police action’.

“At the time of partition of India in 1947, the princely states of India, who in principle had self-government within their territories, were subject to subsidiary alliances with the British, which gave control of external relations to the British. With the Indian Independence Act 1947, the British abandoned all such alliances, leaving the states with the option of opting for full independence. However, by 1948 almost all had acceded to either India or Pakistan. One major exception was that of the wealthiest and most powerful principality, Hyderabad, where the Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan, Asaf Jah VII, a Muslim ruler who presided over a largely Hindu population, chose independence and hoped to maintain this with an irregular army.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annexation_of_Hyderabad.)

No one in ‘global public opinion’ made much fuss. But we are supposed to view the imaginary annexation of Tibet as outrageous. And likewise the actual annexation of first Crimea, and then the Donbass. Western media play that both ways – first they can’t have actually wanted to be Russian, and second it was illegal even if they did want it. But there is nothing that says that secession is not legal. Nothing to say whether Self-Determination must yield to Territorial Integrity or overrides it. UN votes are mostly against secession, and mostly a matter of who a particular state most wants to please.

The USA anyway enforced it for Kosovo. Enforced without even conceding that majority-Serb parts of Kosovo could remain Serb.

The Turkish Republic invaded Cyprus and set up one-third of the island for the Turkish minority. Western powers called it illegal, and no one else recognises Northern Cyprus. But the rest of the world lives with it.

How Imperial China Shaped Tibet

“The Tibet-Qinghai Plateau is the most visible result of a vast ancient collision within the Earth’s crust. A collision that began long before anything human walked upon Earth’s surface, and which is still going on. Far below the Earth’s surface, a tectonic plate carry most of what’s now the Indian subcontinent bumped into the much more massive tectonic plates carrying the rest of Asia. The major processes occurred deep down, but surface effects included the swallowing-up of most of the former Tethys Ocean. What had once been oceans and lowlands were raised up as a gigantic plateau, the biggest on Earth in the present geological era. The Himalayas are just the leading edge; a vast mass of the Earth’s surface has been raised up and crinkled into many huge mountain ranges.”

“On the basis of appearance and language, it is reasonable to believe that Tibetans developed from an ancient lowland population that also gave rise to the Han Chinese. They are part of the same Sino-Tibetan language family – though so are many other peoples, including the Burmese.”

“Most of the Tibet-Qinghai Plateau is poor dry land. It suffers from the same drying-out that has hit the whole of Central Asia over the last few centuries. But the Lhasa Valley is much more fertile, because of a large river that Tibetans call the Yarlung Zangbo. This flows across southern Tibet and breaks through the Himalayas in great gorges: flowing into the Indian Subcontinent. It becomes a great river that is best known as the Brahmaputra.

“The high peaks of the Himalayas were enough of a barrier to keep the Lhasa Valley separate from the politics and religion of the Indian subcontinent. Most of the Tibet-Qinghai Plateau kept its native ‘Bon’ beliefs while Buddhism spread through the Indian subcontinent and then to China along the Silk Road. To the Chinese, Buddhism would not have seemed very different from the native creed of Daoism (Taoism).”

“Western Tibet ... lived its own life. It must always have been known to its neighbours as a strange high impoverished land. But it first attracted wider attention after a ruler called Songtsan Gampo moved his capital to Lhasa and created a huge Tibetan empire. By tradition he was the thirty third king of his dynasty, but these are thought to have been local rulers. Songtsan Gampo’s rule was something new and he came into collision with the newly founded Tang dynasty. The Tang were in some ways China’s high point, and their dominion lasted from the 7th to 10th centuries of the Christian era...

“After some ding-dong battles it was settled in fairly standard manner, by a treaty and a marriage. This is something you find all times and places when there are armies and powerful aristocratic families. The specific form was a marriage by the Tibetan king to a Chinese princess.” (*The Complex Creation of Tibet*, <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/m99-topic-menus-from-long-revolution-website/42-china/tibet/how-tibet-emerged-within-the-chinese-empire/>.)

That was Princess Wencheng, and her existence embarrasses Tibetan separatists. Yet she is solidly part of their religious tradition:

“Both Wencheng and Songtsen Gampo’s first wife, Nepali princess Bhrikuti, are considered to be physical manifestations of the bodhisattvas White Tara and Green Tara respectively.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Princess_Wencheng).

There is no independent evidence that Bhrikuti even existed (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhrikuti#Life>). She may have been invented later, to cover up the awkward fact that a Chinese dynasty played a major role in making Tibet Buddhist, displacing the shamanistic Bon tradition. And to strengthen the very distinctive Lamistic Buddhism that isolated Tibet developed.

My view is that Buddhism is less irrational than Christianity, but still with much superstition

and absurdity. I see the Tibetan sort as a decayed version with inflated claims to secret knowledge.

“Pre-industrial states were generally small unstable entities that lived by drawing wealth from trade or agriculture. The Tibetan plateau was enough of a barrier to ensure that international trade flowed round it. Tibetan goods flowed into the international trade in luxuries and they bought some goods from outside, especially tea from Sichuan. But none of this was important enough to interest any outside powers. If Tibet was fragmented and concerned only with its own affairs, the rulers of China would have seen no reason to concern themselves with more than nominal overlordship.” (<https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/m99-topic-menus-from-long-revolution-website/42-china/tibet/how-tibet-emerged-within-the-chinese-empire/>.)

They did have to take account of the limited government that outside forces helped establish for the Lhasa Valley, which dominates ‘Outer Tibet’, the Tibetan Plateau:

“The Dalai Lama is officially ‘God-King of Tibet’. This overblown usually title gets omitted nowadays. It was still being used in the more-hierarchical 1950s – in a 1959 article by US Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, for instance.[AQ] It was also not seen as an overblown title when it was first used, seven centuries ago. Lots of rulers in those days were defined as being in some way or other God’s Representative. Christian monarchs ruled ‘by the grace of God’. The Chinese Emperor was ‘Son of Heaven’, the Japanese Emperor was (and still is) viewed as a direct descendent of the Sun-Goddess. The distinctive feature of the Tibetan god-king is a claim that this is a single individual, a superhuman controlling his own rebirth into a new body when the old body dies...

“There is a very old Buddhist tradition of a ‘Future Buddha’, but the orthodox teaching suggests that the ‘Future Buddha’ would appear far in the future and after all memory of the original Buddhism had been lost. This did not stop some crazy claims being made, especially where there was no independent educated class able to question it.

“Tibet in the 12th, 13th, and 14th centuries of the Christian era developed the idea of Tulkus, also known as ‘Living Buddhas’. These individuals are deemed to be able to keep continuity in a series of bodies. Various Tibetan monasteries go looking for the reincarnation of their former boss. When the search succeeds, they solemnly enthrone a child in that position, on the assumption that this is the same person. No other branch of Buddhism makes this claim.

“The line of the Dalai Lamas did not invent this tradition, but they currently dominate it. The 3rd and 5th Dalai Lamas obtained a lot of secular power, partly by alliances with various Mongol tribes. The Manchu dynasty, seeking to consolidate its grip on the Chinese Empire, conquered those Mongol tribes but chose to work with the 5th Dalai Lama, whom they accepted as ruler of Western Tibet...

“The 13th Dalai Lama had died in 1933, the 9th Panchen Lama (Tashi Lama) in 1937. The Panchen Lama had been in exile since 1924. Traditionally the two high lamas recognised and legitimised each other’s ‘incarnations’, but those two had been political rivals and the system had broken down. Politics became dangerously factional...

““Norbu was no ordinary apprentice monk, but had been recognised by the 13th Dalai Lama (predecessor of the current Dalai Lama) as the Taktser Rinpoche, one of the highest reincarnates in the region of Amdo (eastern Tibet), which was already under Chinese Nationalist rule. The subsequent discovery of his younger brother as the new incarnate Dalai Lama was not quite so amazing as the usual story makes out. The family was already known in religious circles: the previous Taktser Rinpoche was their father’s maternal uncle and one of their own uncles was treasurer of the great monastery of Kumbum...

“Much of the territory of the Chinese Republic was in practice self-governing

between 1911 and 1949, with 1940 being a low point. The Kuomintang government had lost the coastal cities and had taken refuge in Chongqing in Sichuan, on the borders of Tibet. It needed to have Tibet secure, and Tibet was not at that time claiming to be a sovereign state. Of the various territories not actually under central government control, only the territory that had been Outer Mongolia consistently insisted that it was actually independent, though after the emergence of a Communist government it was widely seen as a Soviet puppet.” (Tibet and its God-King, <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/m99-topic-menus-from-long-revolution-website/42-china/tibet/the-truth-about-the-dalai-lama/>.)

A US report from 1940 mentioned that the current Dalai Lama needed central government support to get accepted:

“There are two other children who theoretically have an equal chance of being chosen. Both were born near Lhasa at the time of the thirteenth Dalai Lama’s death. However, Tibetan and Chinese officials favor the Kokonor boy... the belief that he was foreordained to be the next spiritual ruler of Tibet, without the usual ceremony of drawing lots from the 150-year-old golden urn in the central temple...

“The current Dalai Lama was enthroned with the approval of a Chinese Republic that saw the Lhasa government as no more than a regional authority within its own territory. ‘Free Tibet’ sources evade this awkward matter, since it cannot be squared with the claim that Tibet was always and traditionally independent.” (Ibid.)

I mentioned a US report that I felt had muddled the issue:

“The article does, of course, speak of China and Tibet as two separate entities, as well as describing Tibet as a “semi-autonomous region of China”. The problem in English is that ‘China’ is the normal name for the state and ‘Chinese’ the normal name for its majority people. In Chinese these are ‘Zhongguo’ and the Han people, with non-Han affirming their own identity but mostly accepting that ‘Zhongguo’ is their country.” (Ibid.)

And then another modern report was clearer about what happened back then:

“The Central Government appropriated 400,000 yuan as the expenses for the enthronement ceremony. On the eve of holding enthronement ceremony, there broke out a tea-cup storm due to the seating of Wu Zhongxin. The Kashag planned to arrange the seat of Wu Zhongxin the same as the Siron or Rating. It was sternly refuted by Wu Zhongxin, stating that he was representing the Central Government. His seating should follow the old practice of the Qing Dynasty, namely, to sit side by side with the Dalai Lama to embody the authority and position of the Central Government. The Tibetan authorities agreed to act accordingly. During the duration of his stay in Tibet, Wu Zhongxin decided through consultation with the Tibetan local government to set up “the Office of the Commission for Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs in Lhasa”. The relations between Tibet and the Central Government thus furthered, Wu Zhongxin and his entourage were accorded a grand send-off ceremony by the Tibetan local-government when they left Lhasa.” (Ibid.)

Wu Zhongxin was a Kuomintang central government official and Lieutenant-General. He was given responsibility for Mongolia and Tibet, but was born in Anhui in the Han core of China. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wu_Zhongxin.) He later had a role in the Xinjiang Provincial Government. (https://generals.dk/general/Wu_Zhongxin/_/China.html). The dominant warlord and his main Chinese-Muslim rival were both autonomous but still recognised the central government and did not seek a separate sovereignty.

The Dalai Lama’s Relations With Mao

The government of West Tibet (the Tibetan plateau, U-Tsang) did not think in modern terms:

“The Lhasa government had very seldom claimed to be independent between 1914 and 1949. There was an incident at the Indian independence ceremonies in 1947, in which a Tibetan flag was found to be flying and the Kuomintang government protested and got it taken down. There was no systematic attempt to assert independence until very late in the day – which makes sense if the Lhasa government had dropped the idea when they wanted to enthrone a new Dalai Lama and needed to avoid a disputed succession of the sort that has plagued other lines of supposedly reincarnated lamas. The faction that created the present Dalai Lama must have decided it was better to work with the central Chinese government and have secure power with traditional autonomy. The doubtful claim to independence was allowed to lapse.” (Ibid.)

Current Western reports fail to mention how things were at first:

“When Mao established the first strong government China had seen since the Opium Wars of the 1840s, he had to do something about the various territories inhabited by Tibetans. In the early years, Mao made a genuine attempt to work with the young Dalai Lama. And the Dalai Lama unexpectedly showed a huge enthusiasm for Mao as a man and national leader.” (Ibid)

Mao respected Tibet’s traditional autonomy enough to delay action on slavery:

“Sadly, the Dalai Lama’s enthusiasm for Mao did not extend to freeing his own Tibetan subjects from the mix of serfdom and slavery that supported the aristocracy and high lamas, with himself at the top. The Chinese Empire had been rather late in ending legal slavery, though only two generations than the freedom-loving USA. Slavery in China was abolished in 1910, just before the Empire’s fall. In Nepal it lasted till 1926. In autonomous Western Tibet, the laws of the central Chinese government had limited authority until 1959 and both slavery and serfdom survived till then.” (Ibid)

Tibetan slaves were not then protesting: they took it to be part of the natural order of life. He did not do what the USA have constantly been doing: dump a version of your own system onto people unfamiliar with it, and assume all will be well.

He’d have known that the Dalai Lama was playing about with idea of fighting the Central Government. A book called *The CIA’s Secret War in Tibet* has details, which I quote in my study:

“Back in 1951, he [the Dalai Lama] seems to have aspired to wage war. A US vice-consul from Calcutta drove up to the border on the pretence of taking a holiday. He tried to find out whether the run-away Lhasa government was worth backing:

““Very quickly, the vice consul was struck by the lack of realism displayed by Lhasa’s envoys. ‘There was a sense of the absurd’ he later commented. ‘They were talking wistfully in terms of America providing them with tanks and aircraft’...

““The Tibetans found little reason for cheer. The offer of U.S. asylum, for example, was to be granted only if Asian options were exhausted, even though the Dalai Lama was adamant he wanted exile only in America. Military aid, too, was moot, because it was contingent on Indian approval – a near impossibility, given New Delhi’s desire to maintain cordial ties with China.’

“On top of that, I’d have thought that ordinary Tibetans would have been discouraged by a leader who fully intended to flee thousands of miles away and expected others to fight and die for his cause. In the event there was no deal, though contacts made at that time laid the basis for the later battles fought mostly by Khampas... Khampas were viewed as a bunch of bandits by the inhabitants of Western Tibet, and parts of the Khampa homeland had been split between Chinese provinces well before 1949. Meantime the

Dalai Lama went back to Lhasa and accepted that he ruled Western Tibet as just an autonomous part of China.” (Ibid.)

Not getting US support for getting his people slaughtered, the Dalai Lama compromised. And found he liked Mao: a sentiment he has repeated many times, though again the media omits this off-message fact. But thinking in modern terms was another matter:

“Western Tibet continued to have much the same social system. As ruler, the Dalai Lama managed just one important reform:

“So I decided firstly [in 1953] to abolish the principle of hereditary debt and secondly to write off all government loans that could not be repaid.” (*Freedom in Exile*, page 86)

“The Chinese army was meantime building roads into Tibet, something the Dalai Lama approved of. He found the part-built system useful when he went to Beijing in 1954 for the first session of the first National People’s Congress, where he was made Vice-President of the Steering Committee of the People’s Republic of China (Ibid, page 99). The post carried no significant power, but the Dalai Lama’s real power over Tibetans was recognised and respected. Mao seems to have made great efforts to fit him into the new politics. Like many people from traditional backgrounds, the Dalai Lama found capitalism distasteful. He also found Marxism attractive in the abstract:

“The more I looked at Marxism, the more I liked it. Here was a system based on equality and justice for everyone, which claimed to be a panacea for all the world’s ills. From a theoretical standpoint, its only drawback as far as I could see was its insistence on a purely materialist view of human existence. This I could not agree with. I was also concerned at the methods used by the Chinese in pursuit of their ideals. I received a strong impression of rigidity. But I expressed a wish to become a Party member all the same. I felt sure, as I still do, that it would be possible to work out a synthesis of Buddhist and pure Marxist doctrines that really would be an effective way of conducting politics.” (*Freedom in Exile*, page 98).

“No one let him into the Party, which insists on atheism for all its members. But he was one of many distinguished non-Communists that were fitted in. The widow of Sun Yat-sen was the most notable, and later the writer Han Suyin became a useful overseas supporter. At the time it must have seemed possible to fit the Dalai Lama into the same pattern.” (Ibid)

What went wrong? In my original analysis, I decided the Dalai Lama had been tricked:

“As the Dalai Lama tells it, he was unexpectedly summoned to see Mao. At this meeting, Mao supposedly said:

“Religion is poison. Firstly it reduces the population, because monks and nuns must stay celibate, and secondly it neglects material progress...

“I hoped that he would not sense the horror I felt: it might have broken his trust in me. Luckily, Phuntsog Wangyal was not, for some reason, interpreting between us on this occasion. Had he done so, I am sure he would have discovered my thoughts – especially as we invariably discussed everything together afterwards.” (*Freedom in Exile*, p 108-9)

“It’s very hard to believe that Mao really said ‘religion is poison’ to a young man whose whole life had been religious and whose importance was based on the superstitious belief that he was a religious leader reincarnated. Mao is not known to have said anything similar to anyone else, even to non-religious foreigners or in circles where atheism was the official creed. But the Dalai Lama accepted the remarks at face value, despite not having

his usual translator. Yet it's really hard to believe.

“(By analogy, if one of Britain's Olympic medal-winning yachtsman met the Prime Minister and then reported that the Prime Minister had said ‘I regard yachting as a total waste of time’, would this not seem odd? Especially if that Prime Minister was not on record as denouncing yachting to anyone else – or at least not so violently.)

“It is also notable that Mao's supposed remarks were translated by someone other than Phuntsog Wangyal, who wanted harmony and unity.

“Why didn't the Dalai Lama get his proper translator to write to Mao and ask if there had been some misunderstanding? Brought up to believe himself supernaturally wise, the Dalai Lama seems never to investigate or cross-check. This may have led to a tragic misunderstanding in his last meeting with Mao. It's conceivable that Mao was quoting Marx about ‘religion is the opium of the people’ –much less hostile than it sounds, if you read the whole of what Marx said. Or the whole meeting may have been connived by Tibetan reactionaries seeking to create trouble, with the poisonous words substituted for some routine remark by Mao.” (Ibid.)

Things carried on for a time, but something was bound to happen in the long run. The CIA would have been there in the background, keen to fight to the last Tibetan if they could, or at worse make Mao look bad.

“The Dalai Lama was willing for the time to work with Mao, though not to reform Western Tibet. It was one thing to abstractly admire Marxism as ‘a system based on equality and justice for everyone’, something else for a member of the ruling class to apply it in his own backyard. He was also not pressed to do so. It was events in Eastern Tibet caused a breach, even though the Dalai Lama should have known that no Chinese government would see Eastern Tibet as ruled from Lhasa. The Communists set up ‘Autonomous Prefectures’ and similar lower-level government organisations within existing Chinese provinces, but they also insisted on reform:

“‘Disturbing news began to reach my ears about the activities of the Chinese authorities in Kham and Amdo. Far from leaving the people be, they had begun to press ahead unilaterally with all kind of ‘reform’... large estates were confiscated and the land redistributed by the local Chinese cadres in accordance with their own political ideology. Landowners were publicly arraigned and punished for ‘crimes against the people’; to my horror some were even put to death...

“‘The Khampas, who were not used to outside interference, did not take kindly to Chinese methods: of all their possession, the one they valued above all other was their personal weapon. So when the local cadres began to confiscate these, the Khampas reacted with violence.’ (*Freedom in Exile*, pages 114-115)” (Ibid.)

This was the cause of the Dalai Lama fleeing his home

“The Dalai Lama's actual flight from Tibet was caused by an uprising led by people from Eastern Tibet, who came to Lhasa to protest. It wasn't about anything that had happened in the Tibetan Autonomous Region, though there was a mysterious panic over a belief that the central government representatives were about to kidnap the Dalai Lama. Since they'd let him go to India a few years earlier, the idea seems unlikely. But a major protest started and put forward a claim that Tibet had always been an independent country – a claim that no other state ever recognised, regardless of their hostility to the People's Republic. Pro-Beijing sources also mention a puzzling letter from the Dalai Lama in which he said he had been kidnapped by ‘reactionary forces’. He fails to mention this letter in his own account – if the story were a lie, you would expect him to say so.

“Beyond this, most of the facts are disputed. The ‘Free Tibet’ crowd regard the Dalai Lama’s flight as a great triumph, while the Chinese government insist that they let him go. He arrived in territory with strong links to Tibet, including what was then the ‘North-East Frontier Agency’, viewed as ‘South Tibet’ by the Chinese government and not marked as part of British India until the 1940s. It’s notable that India did not let the Dalai Lama stay there, but instead shoved him far to the west, to Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh, the same place the 13th Dalai Lama had taken refuge in the 1900s. It was a region with historic connections to Tibet, but also overwhelmingly Hindu. He has waited there ever since in the hope of a return on his own terms. He missed the best chances of getting back in the early post-Mao era, when the Central Chinese Government was weaker and needed him more.

“The ‘Free Tibet’ crowd never do ask how many Tibetans were actually ‘unionist’, convinced that Tibet should remain part of China. The Dalai Lama has never asked that Tibet be allowed to choose its own future by referendum, the common demand of secessionists who think they’d win such a vote. Obviously the Chinese government would be very unlikely to allow such a thing – no different from lots of other Asian countries where demands for non-violent secession are illegal. But the Dalai Lama and his people prefer to stand on his position as ruler-for-life of a supposedly independent state, rather than risk asking the people of Tibet to decide.

“The Dalai Lama was created God-King in 1940 and seems content to hang onto the empty title until he dies.” (Ibid.)

He never did understand much of what was going on:

“People credit the Dalai Lama with great wisdom. I didn’t find it in his writings, I didn’t even find run-of-the-mill common-sense. His book *Freedom in Exile* shows some surprising ignorance about Chinese culture and politics. There are puzzling references to a senior Chinese leader called ‘Lu Rau-Chi’. Only when he mentioned this man as one of the Communist Chinese ‘Big Four’ (Page 107) did I realise that this was his version of the man known in the West as Liu Shaoqi or Liu Shao-ch’i. It’s a ludicrous error to get into print, but it’s not the only goof. He also says:

“The Tibetan calendar is rather complicated... we follow a sixty-year cycle, each one of which is assigned to one of the five elements, whose order is earth, air, fire, water and iron; and one of twelve animals: the mouse the ox, the tiger, the hare, the dragon, the serpent, the horse, the sheep, the monkey, the bird, the dog and the pig, again, in order... So for example, according to the Tibetan calendar, the year 2,000 AD will be the Iron Dragon year.” (*Freedom in Exile*, page 43)

“He fails to recognise this as a derivative of the Chinese system, which has almost the same animals and where the year 2000 is the Metal Dragon. Historians think that the system begun as a system for counting days during the Shang Dynasty, and was extended to years under the Han Dynasty. It is best known in the West in connection with astrology, but it is also the normal system for counting years. Variants of this system are used in Korea, Vietnam and Japan, while a Uighur variant was used for many centuries by Iranians and various Turkish peoples. In Tibet it probably arrived with Princess Wencheng, the 7th century Chinese princess who married a Tibetan King and helped promote Buddhism...

“The Dalai Lama’s admiration for Mao’s communists seems to have applied only to what they were applying Marxist principles far away and among people he did not know. When it came to Tibet, he saw things differently:

“Tibetans were much happier. This was due to a number of cultural factors I feel.

Firstly, the relationship between landlord and serf was much milder in Tibet than in China and conditions for the poor were much less harsh. Secondly in Tibet there was never anything like the barbarisms of foot-binding or castration, which until recently had been widespread throughout China. However, I think that these points were lost.” (*Freedom in Exile*, pages 111-112).

“This talk of ‘happy slaves’ reminded me of what plantation-owners said about their slaves in the South of the USA before their secession and Civil War. It’s never explained why the slave-owners would be unwilling to free them, if they were really so loyal and contented and willing to continue obeying their masters.

“As for Chinese foot-binding, this had been made illegal in 1911. Castration had mostly been for men seeking to serve in the imperial palace, was often voluntary and had long vanished by 1954. Other abuses remained, and the Dalai Lama was happy to see the Communists correcting them in unfamiliar places. But Tibet’s feudal order was another matter.

“The man is also gullible. He takes very seriously an omen he thought he saw before his trip to Beijing:

“A statue of one of the protector divinities of Tibet, which is represented as having a buffalo’s head, had clearly moved. When I had first seen it, it was looking down with a rather subdued look on its face. Now, it was facing East, with a very ferocious expression.” (Ibid., Page 91.)

“Unless you want to believe it was a real supernatural event, you have to suspect an articulated statue with exchangeable heads. And as I said before, the Dalai Lama never seems to check facts and can’t have anyone close to him to correct his blunders. Thus he says:

“Not only had Tibetan forces extracted tribute from the Chinese in the eighth century, but Mongolia had actually ruled China from 1279 to 1368, following the successful invasion of Kublai Khan, the Mongolian warlord.

“At this time, there was an interesting historical incident. Kublai Khan became a Buddhist and had a Tibetan guru. This lama persuaded the Mongolian leader to stop his practice of controlling the Chinese population by drowning thousands of them in the sea. In doing so, the Tibetan saved many Chinese lives.” (Page 104).

“The conquest of China was begun by Genghis Khan, who defeated the Jin Dynasty and in 1215 captured Beijing, then known as Yanjing. The Jin were finished by 1234, but the Southern Sung remained powerful south of the Yangtze. Kublai Khan did complete the conquest of the Southern Sung, and then in 1271 set himself up as emperor of a new Chinese dynasty to be called the Yuan Dynasty. Great Khans before Kublai had little interest in Chinese tradition, but he chose to embrace it, while also discriminating against the ethnic Hans whom he viewed as untrustworthy. Many Tibetans served Kublai and they ranked second in a racial hierarchy, with Mongols first, Tibetans and other Central Asians second, North Chinese third and South Chinese lowest.

“A date of 1279 for the start of the Yuan Dynasty is defensible, because only then were the Southern Sung extinguished. But Kublai Khan grew up a Buddhist, in as far as he had any definite faith. The business of drowning seems to confuse two quite separate events. There is a disputed story about the Sinicised Khitan statesman Yelu Chucai stopping a general massacre of the North Chinese under Genghis Khan, supposedly proposed with a view to turning it back into grazing land. There were also many troops lost and drowned in Kublai Khan’s two unsuccessful invasions of Japan, long after both Genghis and Yelu Chucai were dead.” (Ibid.)

The global impression of holiness that Tibetan Buddhism has acquired is also unjustified. Other versions of the faith are much more sincere. Most lamas including the Dalai Lama do eat meat sometimes, which stricter Buddhist monks do not:

“Most Westerners think of Buddhism as a vegetarian creed, but in fact practice varies:

“In the Theravada countries of Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka, monks are allowed by the vinaya to accept almost any food that is offered to them, including meat unless they suspect the meat was slaughtered specifically for them; while in China and Vietnam, monks are expected to eat no meat...

“In Tibet, where vegetables have been historically very scarce... vegetarianism is very rare, although the Dalai Lama and other esteemed lamas invite their audiences to adopt vegetarianism when they can.’
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vegetarianism_in_Buddhism).

“Actually Tibet grows plenty of barley and also produces a lot of milk and butter, but the monks prefer meat, the most prized food among the ruling class in almost all countries. In Tibet the top monks were the rulers and intertwined with the traditional aristocrats. The actual killing was done by Kashmiri Muslims, who always had that role in Tibetan life. But almost all of the market demand was created by Tibetan Buddhists.”
(Ibid.)

The Ongoing Dispute

I put the issue in a global context in 2008, with “*Fight to the Last Tibetan*”

“Britain has never apologised for the Opium Wars. The British government in the 1840s chose to kick down the door and intimidate the Chinese Empire. Undermine an old and self-contained state that had been content with its own way of life. Britain demanded trade, and would not accept the Chinese view that their sort of trade would be lethal for China’s existing values. Trade was imposed, and was indeed lethal for China’s existing values.

“Britain also refused to try to rule and reshape China as they were ruling and reshaping India. The Empire felt overstretched, or rather the ruling stratum already had as much as it could handle without bringing in non-whites or Britons below the privileged ranks of the Upper Middle Class. Britain stopped short of trying to rule China as a whole, and also made sure that no other European power got the chance. But when China began to regenerate itself through the Taiping Rebellion in the 1850s, Britain and the other imperialist powers made sure that the Taiping lost.

“The First Opium War (1839-42) could be seen as the start of the modern norm, what’s called Neo-Imperialism or Hegemonism. Rather than the advanced industrialised countries accepting the expense and responsibility of ruling pre-industrial countries, they kept weak governments in being. Such governments could be blamed for misgovernment, yet also prevented from actually looking after their own people.

“The Chinese Empire in its last decades was a classic example of a weak government kept in being by foreign powers. The same was true of the western-style Chinese Republic that existed from 1911 to 1949. The Kuomintang (Guomindang) promised more when they took over in 1927-28, but they failed to deliver. China’s economic take-off began under Mao. (<https://longrevolution.wordpress.com/42-china/mao-and-china/>)...

“Britain, France and the USA were the first three countries to get big benefits from

the Opium Wars – the US with the Treaty of Wanghia and France with the Treaty of Whampoa, both negotiated in 1844. They got concessions that gave foreigners the right to rampage through China and disrupt it. They wanted to convert the Chinese to Christianity and they wanted to make them part of Western civilisation – a process we'd nowadays call 'Cultural Genocide'.

"Britain, France and the USA were also the countries where April 2008's anti-China Olympic protests were the most successful. In those countries – and nowhere else in the world – the police failed to contain protestors who thought they had a right to disrupt the torch relay, normally a bland event of interest just to sports enthusiasts and to patriots in the host country.

"What the anti-China demonstrators thought they were achieving by attacking a small woman in a wheelchair is anyone's guess. They should not have been surprised that they simply angered the vast majority of Chinese. Offended them to such a degree that it would now be almost impossible for China's leaders to make major concessions to the Tibetan exiles, even if they could be persuaded that it was a good thing to do...

"I can understand the motives of the Free Tibet crowd. Even Sharon Stone had said some sensible things about the Iraq War, before her appalling remarks about the Chinese earthquake being some sort of Divine Punishment. (Though it would have been a very odd thing for a responsible Deity to do, since the area hardest hit included lots of ethnic Tibetans.) I can understand the sentiments of the Free Tibet crowd, but they need to see the wider picture. Including the way the USA has used Tibetans without caring how much they might get hurt.

"At the start of the Second World War, opponents of the war suggested that 'Britain would fight to the last Frenchman'. [Ap] In the event, ordinary Britons were serious about that war. Most of the work of actually defeating Nazi Germany was done by the Soviet Union, and a lot of the rest by the USA. But Britain did its part and there was a great deal of individual heroism.

"In the case of Tibet, the overseas supporters risk nothing. Within Tibet, you have rioters who are only bold in the face of soft targets. There was also once a limited fight by some of the displaced ruling class of a Tibetan people called the Khampas, but that was closed down long ago. The outside world is not going to fight for Tibet, though they will happily 'fight to the last Tibetan' as a way of sniping at China." <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/m99-topic-menus-from-long-revolution-website/42-china/tibet/why-the-west-should-not-be-encouraging-tibetan-separatism/>

I saw it as part of a delusion by people who are very clever on their own ground, but fail to realise how alien the rest of the world is.

"The Neo-Cons may have schemed to rip away Tibet in the same way as they ripped Kosovo from Serbia. I've a definite memory of the topic being discussed at the time. But that was scheduled to happen after their planned success in Iraq and Iran and North Korea. Besides, China is a hundred times bigger than Serbia. China has nuclear weapons. China makes lots of cheap manufactured goods that the USA could not easily get from anywhere else.

"The Dalai Lama could have used the 2008 Olympics to get the best possible deal for old-fashioned Tibetan values. Instead he has been used as part of a haphazard campaign against China that has broadly failed. After getting nowhere he seems to have opted for more of the same: he gives every sign of having learned nothing and forgotten nothing. One wishes there were some good news for Tibet's better traditions, but really there isn't." (Ibid.)

Since then, China has become more open to tourism. But maybe not for foreigners in Tibet, since Beijing rightly suspects covert agents.

The wider process has continued worldwide. I was one of several people to instantly say in 2014 that the West was ‘fighting to the last Ukrainian’. I knew that the West would not dare use air power against nuclear-armed Russia. Not only was there a risk of global conflict, but there was also a problem of how to respond if Russia had used a nuclear-armed hypersonic missile to sink one of the USA’s enormously expensive aircraft carriers.

I also insisted that what happened from 2014 to 2022 was a Ukrainian Civil War. East Ukraine wanted respect for their minority views, just as Northern Ireland’s Roman Catholics fought to achieve respect and let the mainstream of the IRA disband itself when that was achieved.

The Minsk Agreements would have given the Donbass protection against a Kiev government that made heroes of Ukrainian nationalists from World War Two. War criminals who were sometimes allies of Hitler and at all times killers of Jews and Poles. But the West told Kiev to just play along while they trained a hard-line army that could overrun the Donbass, just as Croatia’s NATO-trained army drove out Serbs from majority-Serb regions of Croatia. Yet I’d suppose it was a double bluff: the top people would have fully expected a Russian invasion, though I doubt many Ukrainians were told how much they might suffer.

Anti-Russian Ukrainians became one of a string of foreign nations hurt badly after thinking the USA cared about them.

I also doubt they expected Russia to be as tough and resistant as Russia has actually been. But the Democrats and the pre-Trump Republican consensus are still keen to fight to the last Ukrainian.

What’s tragic is that Western-orientated Ukrainians had a much better option. Let the Donbass be autonomous. Accept that Crimea is something they can protest at but live with, just as Greeks and Greek Cypriots have been living with Turkish Northern Cyprus since 1974. Whereas Western Tibet and Eastern Tibet were no good example in the 1950s.

Old Tibet comes across as superstitious and narrow, even when described by sympathisers like Heinrich Harrer. In *Seven Years In Tibet*, he mentions that skiing was considered an insult to the mountain-gods and not allowed. The elite had rather constricted lives, but life for ordinary people was much narrower and less free.

For my own part, I said:

“I can’t find anything admirable in the traditional Tibetan custom of people prostrating themselves flat on the ground before their idols, not just once but repeatedly, thinking that by doing this they ‘gained merit’ for a better life in their next incarnation.

“The Free Tibet crowd must believe that slavery, serfdom and a feudal system were necessary parts of what someone called Tibet’s “old, humanly rich, unprogressive culture”. They must think it was OK that 9 in 10 Tibetans were serfs. Find it acceptable that 1 in 20 was an actual slave. Be unconcerned that slaves and serfs had no legal protection against their lords, suffering oppression and mutilation without any redress. The Free Tibet crowd mostly don’t address these issues. You do get some evasive comments in the Dalai Lama’s autobiography and in the writings of Heinrich Harrer, Hollywood’s favourite SS man. On a return visit, he noted with irritation that servants were no longer as docile as they were in his day. (He himself was ranked as an aristocrat by the Tibetan elite when they decided to let him stay after his epic journey to Lhasa.)

“Lots of visitors to Old Tibet said that the ordinary people were happy. Likewise lots of white visitors to the US South before their secession said the slaves were happy. In both Tibet and the USA, the former slaves said something very different, when they were finally free to speak.

“The Free Tibet crowd would have trouble explaining why the Dalai Lama did

nothing significant about Tibetan feudalism during the years he was ruling Western Tibet as an autonomous region of the People's Republic. He made no serious reforms, apart from abolishing hereditary debts in 1953.[H] If the Dalai Lama remained the legitimate government after 1959, as he now claims, then the former serfs and slaves of Tibet must legally remain just that, because he's still not done anything about it.

"Feudalism in Western Tibet lasted till 1959, because Mao actually did respect the traditional autonomy of the territories governed from Lhasa. This moderate arrangement ended when a revolt was launched by members of the Tibetan elite who'd fled the end of feudalism in Eastern Tibet. Western Tibet had been left alone, apart from getting roads and an airport, which the Dalai Lama approved of. Eastern Tibet – Amdo and eastern Kham – had never been ruled by the Dalai Lama. Well before Mao took over, these territories had lost their official Tibetan identity and had become parts of various Chinese provinces. They remained rather lawless, but there was no legal right to autonomy until the Chinese Communists created various Autonomous Prefectures etc. for Tibetans and other minorities.

"What the Chinese Communists did in Eastern Tibet was what any competent modern government would have done, ending lawlessness and carrying through a basic land reform. There were of course a lot of unhappy members of the displaced elite, including the Dalai Lama's elder brother. (A man who was already a high Lama and a rising power when his little brother was 'discovered' for the top job.)". (Ibid.)

I summarised their attitude as 'Give Me Liberty and Give Me Slaves', which I had already coined for the US South for their 1860s secession.

Looking at Tibet's supporters, I said:

"'Occupied Tibet', said some of the protestors, and the Dalai Lama has said it as recently as 1987. Joanna Lumley – successor to Cathy Gale and Emma Peel in Britain's spy-fantasy series *The Avengers* and a minor Bond Girl in the 1969 film *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* – is currently a 'big-name' supporter of 'Free Tibet'. She put it thus:

"'But China invaded Tibet. It invaded it. So all this nonsense about them being the same country is absurd. It's called Tibet. If it was part of China, it would be called China, wouldn't it?"

"By that logic, Essex isn't part of England and Tipperary can't be part of Ireland. A lady born in what's currently the Indian half of Kashmir ought to take a subtler view. Of course she left very early, an offspring of the long-lasting British-in-India community that was dumped back home at independence. A lot of them took minimal notice of the 'natives' unless they actually had to administer them. While looking into the history of George Orwell, I was surprised to discover that he was born in Motihari in what is now Bihar. Interestingly, this is also where Mahatma Gandhi started his 'Satyagrah' (Search for Truth). The farmers of the region were forced to sow either Opium or Indigo on part of their farm plots. Orwell's father worked for the Opium Department, an entirely legal branch of Britain's government of India. Modern biographers of Orwell show a predictable lack of interest in the matter: he was built up as a Cold War hero and it's embarrassing to find him connected to the dirtier parts of European Imperialism. To attitudes that are far from dead: one book about Orwell that showed him being held by a small elderly black woman, presumably his nurse while he was in Motihari, but the book treats her as a non-person and labels it as Orwell (Eric Blair) as a baby." (Ibid.)

The book in question was *George Orwell: A Life* by Bernard Crick. Crick was born in Britain, but educated at a fee-paying school that was founded in 1596 by the then Archbishop of Canterbury. Part of the elite: an elite who tell Tibetans that they have inherent rights that have never actually been real.

“When the Chinese Empire was incorporated into modern politics, Tibet was universally accepted as part of the Empire. No sovereign government or authorised international body has ever at any time accepted Tibet as sovereign.

“(The “International Commission of Jurists” ruled in favour of Tibetan exiles, but they are a self-appointed body with no valid authority. International Cowboy Jurisprudence would be a more fitting name. They also failed to say definitely that it was independent: they merely criticised the way it was ruled.)” (Ibid.)

The 1911 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is available on-line. It is clear about what Tibet was then:

“Though the whole of Tibet is under the suzerainty of China, the government of the country is divided into two distinct administrations, the one under the rule of the Dalai Lama of Lhasa, the other under local kings or chiefs, and comprising a number of ecclesiastical fiefs. Both are directed and controlled by the high Chinese officials residing at Lhasa, Sining Fu; and the capital of the Chinese province of Szechuen [Sichuan]....

“In January 1908 the final instalment of the Tibetan indemnity was paid to Great Britain, and the Chumbi valley was evacuated. The Dalai Lama was now summoned to Peking, where he obtained the imperial authority to resume his administration in place of the provisional governors appointed as a result of the British mission. He retained in office the high officials then appointed, and pardoned all Tibetans who had assisted the mission.

“But in 1909 Chinese troops were sent to operate on the Szechuen frontier against certain insurgent lamas, whom they handled severely. When the Dalai Lama attempted to give orders that they should cease, the Chinese amban in Lhasa disputed his authority, and summoned the Chinese troops to enter the city. They did so, and the Dalai Lama fled to India in February 1910, staying at Darjeeling. Chinese troops followed him to the frontier, and he was deposed by imperial decree. The British government, in view of the apparent intention of China to establish effective suzerainty in Tibet, drew the attention of the government at Peking to the necessity of strictly observing its treaty obligations, and especially pointing out that the integrity of the frontier states of Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim must be respected. To the Dalai Lama, who had attempted to obtain British intervention at Peking, it was made clear that he personally had no claim to this, as the British government could only recognize the de facto government in Tibet.’...

“At the Simla Convention of 1913-14, the British tried to define the territory actually controlled by the Lhasa government as ‘Outer Tibet’, with ‘Inner Tibet’ being the former provinces of Kham and Amdo, which the Chinese Empire had digested into upland portions of regular provinces. Simla would have officially limited China’s authority in Western Tibet (Outer Tibet) to ‘suzerainty’ rather than sovereignty. The Lhasa government was willing to settle for this, but the Chinese Republic thought it too big a concession.” (Ibid.)

Causes of Violence in Tibet

In response to the violence in 2008, I decided I needed to explain what was going on when the Western influence led to some Tibetans inside Tibet turning to violence.

First an article on immediate events: “*Vandalism and Bloodshed in Lhasa*”.

“Back at the start of March 2008, I was assuming that there would be a few protests over Tibet, but nothing new. But reports from the 15th told how something much worse had happened, that anti-government protests had turned into ethnic attacks:

“British journalist James Miles, in Lhasa, told the BBC that rioters had taken control of the city centre.

“‘Some of them are still attacking Chinese properties – shops, restaurants, owned by ethnic Chinese,’ he said. [<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7296837.stm>]

“‘Well it’s early evening here, and the old Tibetan quarter of Lhasa still is very much in the control of the ethnic Tibetans who have been rioting for the last several hours since midday.

“‘Some of them are still attacking Chinese properties, shops, restaurants, owned by ethnic Chinese. Some of them are looting those shops, taking out the contents and throwing them on huge fires which they’ve lit in the street.” [<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7297248.stm>]

“The BBC was caught between the known facts and the agenda it had decided upon before-hand, so they could make no sense of it...

“The BBC were slow to admit that people as well as property were being attacked. But there was little excuse for not knowing, as I found when I checked other Western news sources. Many people saw it or talked to eye witnesses. Ethnic Hans – the Chinese majority – were being targeted. So too were the Hui people, Muslims whose culture is similar to the Han and who have moved into Tibet as its economy developed.

(<https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/m99-topic-menus-from-long-revolution-website/42-china/tibet/the-tibetan-race-riots-of-2008/>)

It fitted a global pattern of ethnic violence. People had lived alongside each other, but then identity becomes a cause of violence:

“‘Here we have seen people trying to stone anyone they can – Han and other minorities, not foreigners. The Tibetans had stones and knives. I saw Chinese people running away – there was nothing they could do...

“‘This area used to be a place where Tibetans and the Chinese were friendly.”
(Ibid)

One place this used to be true was Northern Ireland. An IRA campaign from 1956 to 1962 got little popular support and was abandoned. The Roman Catholic minority disliked the way that regional and local government was entirely Protestant, with no interest shown in the occasional Catholic Unionist. But they lived with it. Then Civil Rights, a demand to end Protestant political privilege, was seen as a threat rather than an opportunity by Protestant politicians. IRA / Sinn Fein were much smarter, seeing it as an opportunity despite the threat of Catholics in Northern Ireland becoming reconciled to the UK state, as they are in Mainland Britain. Almost all of the Catholics wanted a United Ireland and almost all Protestants found this unacceptable. The current relative peace is based on Sinn Fein being part of the government and content to move slowly, with Protestants now a minority but capable of a lot of violence.

This was achieved after many missed opportunities. And these were anyway people similar to the English: people sometimes incorporated as individuals in the Upper London that holds real power. Tibetans were alien and suitable for cannon-fodder at a time when China was refusing to surrender its values.

But the grand strategy was flawed. The aim was to win over China’s Han majority: but they and the various minorities saw Tibet as a sometimes-disloyal member of a Chinese family of nations that must be defended. They were no more likely to let it go than a Hindu would let their government abandon Kashmir.

Back in 2008, I noted how the BBC was getting it wrong. How it was no longer the honest independent voice it once was:

“Anyone who’d trusted the BBC would have been let down. But the BBC was designed to be Britain’s voice, ‘Britain’ being taken to be the range of opinions expressed in Parliament. It seems that our current crop of MPs only get angry when the BBC mention

inconvenient truths. They've imbibed the wisdom of Deconstruction and are full of a Post-Truthful Wisdom that tells them that facts are whatever you want them to be. They also failed to realise how this would look to ordinary Chinese, or to not-so-ordinary Chinese who might look to the West as a better alternative to their own system, but not on an issue like Tibet or racial attacks on other Han Chinese." (Ibid)

Much the same as later happened in Hong Kong: see <https://www.quora.com/q/pwgdwxusqvnzzrlzm/Hong-Kong-Committing-Suicide>. Far from boosting pro-Western Chinese, it repelled them.

"The BBC [in 2008] preferred to be Post-Truthful. And have since been very puzzled at the growth of anti-Western sentiments among Chinese bloggers, the sort of people they'd ear-marked to be a useful 5th Column.

"A minor defect of becoming a lying news service is that you lose your moral advantage over the official media of one-party states. And Beijing decided it was a good time to lift the long-standing blocks they had had on the BBC's English-language websites. Let potential dissidents get a good look and discover that the BBC was very far from trustworthy." (Ibid.)

Legal Matters

International Diplomacy is never law. It is a set of norms that in a crisis get settled by power and violence. The USA makes things worse by undermining what norms there are. China's approach is better suited to keeping the peace. And on Tibet, it is fully in line with what already exists.

In 2012, I did a short survey of Tibet's status, using some extra sources.

"Tibet's claims to independence or autonomy is popular round the world, especially in California. Rumour has it that California had native inhabitants before the arrival of the current Anglo and Latino settlers, but almost all of them were slaughtered with none of the drama of Native American resistance elsewhere in the continent...

"In the case of Tibet, the Chinese army were not invaders but a Central Government creating modern political norms in a country which had been fragmented for decades. It had been more than a thousand years since there was a recognised independent government in the Lhasa Valley, the well-populated core of the Tibetan Plateau. Much of the time, there was nothing except a collection of local rulers, some of whom found it convenient to be recognised as nominal underlings by whoever ruled China at the time. And that's just Western Tibet, the Tibetan Plateau and the Lhasa Valley. The Dalai Lama's claims extend to Eastern Tibet, the territories Tibetans view as Kham and Amdo, provinces when Tibet was an empire. But those territories had been ruled as parts of Chinese provinces and had not been ruled from Lhasa, though they had religious links to it...

"The Tibetan Empire was extensive and non-Buddhist, with the native 'Bon' shamanism originally dominant. It was gradually replaced by a version of Buddhism that arrived with a Tang-Chinese princess who was married to the Tibetan King. This 'Greater Tibet' defined itself as a major kingdom within Zhongguo and briefly held the Tang capital. They might have created a new ethnic-Tibetan ruling dynasty for Zhongguo, but the Tang recovered while the Tibetan Empire fell apart. The last-but-one Tibetan King defined the relationship between the Tibetan King and Chinese Emperor as one of "nephew and uncle": accepting Tibet as a powerful peripheral part of Zhongguo.

"The very last Tibetan King was assassinated by a Buddhist hermit – Buddhism in lands where it is powerful has as many moral ambiguities and deviations from the ideal as Christianity ever had. And over the centuries, Tibetan Buddhism had changed from its Han-Chinese roots, importing ideas from other versions of Buddhism still present south of

the Himalayas. It also compromising with Bon Shamanism to produce a distinctive hybrid very different from older Buddhist forms.

“Meantime after the fall of the Tang Dynasty, Zhongguo fragmented, with most of the fragments aspiring to rule the whole territory. This was true not just of the Han-origin Song dynasty, but also of the Liao Dynasty, monarchs of Khitan tribalists who were related to the later Mongols...

“During this time, there was no known government on the Tibetan Plateau or the Lhasa Valley. Presumably there were local rulers, but the records are vague. There was also a Western Xia kingdom, covering parts of Gansu, eastern Qinghai, northern Shaanxi, northeastern Xinjiang, southwest Inner Mongolia, and southernmost Outer Mongolia. They called themselves the “The Great Xia State of the White and the Lofty”. Its ruling core are usually described as Tanguts, close to Tibetans and influenced by them. Most of their records are lost, so it’s unclear whether or not they viewed themselves as part of Zhongguo.

“The Western Xia were conquered and devastated by the Mongols. Tibet and most of the Han core of China were also conquered: North China early on and South China much later. But the Mongols, unlike other step nomads on the borders of China, viewed Zhongguo as just one part of their conquered territories until part-way through the reign of Kublai Khan. He claimed to be the 5th Great Khan of the Mongol when his elder brother the 4th Great Khan died in 1260. Kublai’s younger brother Ariq Boke made the same claim, but lost the consequent civil war. Yet Kublai was never in solid control of the Mongol Empire, and so decided to establish himself as Emperor of Zhongguo, re-founding what became Beijing as a new capital called Khanbaliq or Dadu. It replaced Xanadu, his earlier Summer Capital, the place that Coleridge dreamt of.

“Kublai Khan was officially Emperor of China from 1271, a claim strengthened when the last of the Southern Sung were conquered and the dynasty officially ended in 1279. The Confucian scholars accepted that the ‘mandate of heaven’ had moved to the new dynasty, despite its exotic origins. Some Chinese histories even extend Kublai’s “Yuan Dynasty” backwards and list the first four Great Khans as Emperors of China, which is rather like listing Adolph Hitler as President of Poland. But Kublai and his successors did act as regular Chinese emperors, while also keeping ethnic privileges for Mongols and lesser privileges for other non-Han Central Asians, including Tibetans. It was a complete hierarchy, with North Chinese ranking below Central Asians but above South Chinese...

“From 1368, Tibet was vaguely under the control of the Ming Dynasty, Han who overthrew the Mongol dynasty. Various Tibetan rulers recognised successive Ming Emperors as their overlord, but were otherwise left to run their own lives. Since Tibet was poor and thinly populated and the capital city Lhasa about a year’s journey from Beijing, no Emperor would care much what happened so long as he was hailed politely as superior.

“Things changed with the Qing or Manchu dynasty that took over China after a Han bandit and Imperial claimant sacked Beijing, forcing the last significant Ming Emperor to suicide. The Qing were Jurchen and had formed a state that blended Jurchen, Mongol and Han settlers north of the Great Wall under a common Manchu identity, and with a military organisation as Bannermen. They were let through the Great Wall by a Ming general who viewed the Han bandit as the greater enemy, or perhaps hoped to become Emperor himself in the longer run. It took a long hard struggle before the Manchus won out. But even before being let through the Great Wall, they had claimed to be the legitimate rulers of Zhongguo, forming their own Imperial Court while also retaining their Manchu identity.

“If Tibet had remained marginal and fragmented, concerned just with living its own

life, it might have been left alone after nominal submission to the new dynasty. This was what happened with the well-organised kingdom of Korea. But the newly established Qing dynasty faced a long challenge from the Zunghars, a tribal coalition led by Mongols in what is now Xinjiang. The Zunghars might easily have emerged as the new rulers of Zhongguo rather than the Manchus. And they broadly created the office of Dalai Lama, giving their support to one particular line of Buddhist abbots with a new 'Yellow Hat' brand of Buddhism. After some complex politics, the Manchus persuaded the 5th Dalai Lama to switch, and thereafter ensure that the combined government of the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama would rule Western Tibet, the Tibetan Plateau. Other Tibetans in Eastern Tibet were ruled separately, usually in ethnically-mixed provinces with Han or Manchu governors appointed and freely replaced by the Emperor." (*Tibet: International Law Is On China's Side*. <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/m99-topic-menus-from-long-revolution-website/42-china/tibet/tibet-and-international-law/>)

It is worth adding that Korea emerged out of several similar but separate states: a common global pattern. The Joseon dynasty ruled from 1392 to 1897, when Imperial Japan annexed it. It had recognised the Ming Dynasty as distant overlords, and Ming forces had helped it fight off a Japanese invasion at the end of the 16th century. An invasion that is in the backstory of James Clavel's historic fiction *Shogun*, incidentally. Korea then had peace until the Ming Dynasty were overthrown by the Qing, with the Qing invading until the Korean monarchy accepted them as lawful successors of Ming power. They kept the same loose overlordship, with Korea finding it a useful defence against Russian and Japanese aggression.

"The 18th century saw an invasion of Tibet by Nepal. After defeating this, the Central Government got a stronger grip and established a pair of Ambans, direct representatives in Lhasa appointed by the Emperor. This was significantly different from the position of Korea and Vietnam, where the King of Korea and the Emperor of Vietnam offered tribute when they felt like it but didn't have any permanent representative of the Chinese Emperor to meddle with their lives.

"Colonial expansion in Asia in the 19th century saw the links with Vietnam definitely repudiated as France took it over, and those with Korea broken as Japan took it over and officially absorbed it. The Tibetan Plateau was eyed with interest by the British Raj, but the government in London must have disliked the idea of annexing it. Such a blow against Chinese pride might have threatened the vastly more important and profitable British position in the Yangtze Valley, where opium and cheap foreign manufactures were being pumped into the Han core. This was through Shanghai and other ports under foreign control, though nominally under Chinese sovereignty. It was a delicate situation, and London saw no need to increase Chinese anger and feelings of national humiliation for the sake of possessing the economically marginal Tibetan Plateau.

"Had the Chinese Empire been divided and annexed by the various intruding Western Empires – which was seriously considered in the late 19th century – then it's highly likely that at least Western Tibet would have gone to British India. It might then have become a province of independent India. But it didn't happen...

"In much of China, the local warlords did as they pleased [from 1912] and Chiang's Central Government [from 1927] had little power.

"Tibet was one of many self-governing fragments of what was officially a sovereign republic, but the Lhasa government had aspired to independence. 1914 saw the Simla Conference, organised by the British Raj and with representatives of both the weak government in Beijing and the Dalai Lama's government in Lhasa. The Dalai Lama's people arrived claiming to be the independent government of Greater Tibet, the territories that Tibetans called Kham and Amdo as well as the area that the Dalai Lama actually controlled. When the British refused to support this, the claim was reduced to the idea of

the Tibetan Plateau being autonomous under Beijing's 'suzerainty', while Kham and Amdo were agreed to be under Central Government sovereignty. This was agreed between Lhasa, the British in India and Beijing's representative, but Beijing repudiated it and it was not considered binding. This also left open the border between British India and the Chinese Republic: Lhasa was quite happy to give away "South Tibet", the territories that are now the Indian province of Arunachal Pradesh. But no Chinese government has ever accepted this.

"During the 1930s, the Tibetan Plateau drifted into anarchy. The Panchen Lama was driven out, the 13th Dalai Lama died, then the exiled Panchen Lama also died. Meantime Eastern Tibet – Kham and Amdo – were ruled by various non-Tibetan warlords, all of whom recognised some sort of Central Government for Zhongguo. In 1938, the Central Chinese Government – officially based at Nanjing since 1927 – was driven into the interior of China by the invading Japanese and chose to take refuge in Chongqing (Chongking) in Sichuan, on the borders of Tibet. This may have persuaded them to take a closer interest in Tibet, which was among other things a possible link to British India. A railway link across the Tibetan Plateau was seriously considered as a means of bringing supplies to the blockaded Chinese Republic, but it was never in fact built.

"It was anyway time to find the 'reincarnations' of the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lamas. Recognition depended in part on a child recognising as his own objects that belonged to the last 'incarnation' when they were mixed among other similar objects. That's to say, it is either a genuine miracle or a cynical fraud arranged between the monks and the child's parents. Unlike concepts like Transubstantiation or healing at Lourdes, there is no middle ground whereby a sceptic could say that believers were sincere but mistaken... Well before the status of the Dalai Lama became an issue in Cold War politics, people had suggested a wholesale fraud. (Lattimore, Owen and Eleanor. *Silks, Spices and Empire: Asia seen through the eyes of its discoverers*. page 142.)" (Ibid.)

Hollywood's Favourite SS Man

I didn't start writing about Tibet in 2008. As I mentioned earlier, in 1997, there was a film called *Seven Years In Tibet*. Having read the book years ago, I knew how dishonestly they were handling the source:

"Many people will have got their impression of the Tibet issue from the Hollywood film of Harrer's *Seven Years In Tibet*. It is beautifully made drama and is said to give a real impression of the place, using footage filmed in a portion of the Andes that happens to resemble Tibet. An above-average drama – and also a pack of lies. Plausible but untruthful from beginning to end.

"The first bit of nonsense happens when Harrer is about to set off on a mountaineering expedition to a peak in British India. He is hailed as a 'German hero' by a Nazi official, and replies 'Thank you, but I'm Austrian'. To have said that in 1939 would have been extremely bold, since Austria had been part of Greater Germany since April 1938. Harrer says nothing about any such remark, and it is out of keeping with what he does admit to...

"It next wanders away from truth with a dramatic encounter with unnamed Tibetan bandits." (<https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/m99-topic-menus-from-long-revolution-website/42-china/tibet/falsehoods-in-seven-years-in-tibet/>).

I mentioned these earlier, in connection with the 1959 revolt. I'll repeat that briefly, in its broader context:

"Harrer's own account is very different: a series of alarming but inconclusive meetings with people he calls 'Khampas'

“‘Khampa’ must mean an inhabitant of the eastern province of Tibet, which is called Kham. But you never heard the name mentioned without an undertone of fear and warning. At last we realised that the word was synonymous with ‘robber’.” (*Seven Years In Tibet*, towards the end of chapter 5.)

“Harrer was writing in 1953. Khampas fighting the Chinese Red Army were later defined as warriors of freedom rather than bandits objecting to being put out of business. Had Italy gone Communist, the Sicilian Mafia and its allies in the Camorra and ‘Ndrangheta might have done something similar – and there was a brief and insignificant attempt at Sicilian separatism using bandits for firepower...”

“The film shows shocking violence by the Chinese Army against Tibetans, including helpless non-combatants. This contradicts what people reported at the time. Harrer himself says:

“‘In 1910 the invading Chinese had plundered and burned when they came to Lhasa, and the inhabitants were paralyzed with fear that these outrages would be repeated. Nevertheless it is fair to say that during the present war the Chinese troops had showed themselves disciplined and tolerant. and Tibetans who had been captured and then released were saying how well they had been treated.’ (*Seven Years In Tibet*, towards the end of chapter 16.)...

“It is by comparison a minor invention the Chinese generals arrive by air, several years before Lhasa Gonggar Airport was constructed. The Chinese People’s Army have always been versatile, but actually they came by land across a country with no good roads.”(Ibid.)

But Why Religion Then? Why Atheism Now?

Buddhism is an admirable creed, but also one that formed in an age of ignorance. When humans invented agriculture, they laid the basis for a minority of humans living very rich lives at the expense of the rest. And also fighting wars, to plunder the weak and also to take things from rival elites.

There were also frequent epidemics, caused by vast masses of people living close to each other. And keeping animals and birds that could infect us.

Without modern science, there was no easy way out. Buddhism was the most successful of several creeds that decided the best answer was to stop desiring much.

Ideally, desire nothing. A devout Buddhist is the ultimate dropout, aspiring to drop out of the universe entirely. The material world is a mere illusion.

I’ve never accepted this. I looked at the oddities of subatomic physics and found they showed just that our own experience of the universe does not tell us everything. My arguments are on-line as *In a Hole In a Hole Dwelt a Nothingness*, <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/problems-magazine-past-issues/in-a-hole-in-a-hole-dwelt-a-nothingness/>.

The world is real and can be improved. The foolishness of Brezhnev wrecked the once-hopeful and flourishing Soviet Union, but the Soviet challenge ended most forms of imperialism: ending up as itself the last-but-one version of imperialism. Last before the US-Western Europe hegemony fails, which may be soon. And while the Reagan-Thatcher Aberration has caused much misery, we have seen their future and it does not work.

New Right thinkers tended to discard the useful parts of Christianity or Judaism or whatever else they like to make a supernatural link to. Believe that aggression and trickery are the keys to success, which is definitely not true in the long term or for an entire society.

I wrote an attempt at an historic explanation: *Religions as Imperfect Human Understanding*; <https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/040-religion-as-a-mode-of-human-existence/religions-as-imperfect-human-understanding/>. Societies worked better for as long as threats of supernatural punishment and promises of heavenly reward led people to behave better than they might have.

It can fail in practice:

“Thai woman arrested for blackmailing monks with thousands of videos after sex...

“This scandal is the latest to rock Thailand's much revered Buddhist institution, which in recent years has been plagued with allegations of monks engaging in sex offences and drug trafficking.” (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cjelg7q845zo>.)

This version of Buddhism shows that the creed is no more immune to corruption than Christians are. But the Tibetan version is worse. Long before the Dalai Lama, they added ideas that no other branch of Buddhism believes in. Claimed that they had a large number of Living Buddhas, and that these paragons regularly came back as reincarnations who could resume their duties.

An inferior version of a social force that is increasingly failing. Globally, a revival of religion as The Truth has led to hatred for neighbours who defy The Truth. Burmese and Sri Lankan Buddhists, Hindus in the Republic of India, Muslims in much of the Muslim world. And while Christianity is in genial decline in Western Europe and in mild revival in Middle Europe and Russia, in the USA it has become a creed that hates socialism and anything it sees as socialist.

With modern science discrediting cherished religious beliefs, socialism arose as a replacement for it. One that worked imperfectly when socialists took power, but mostly better than the alternatives.

As I see it, Leninism was a Militarised Socialism, responding to a world in which liberal imperialists undermined civilisation in the First World War. And in which fascists wanted to repeat the same horrors. Leninism let us overcome that, but then made a grand blunder in the Soviet Union by failing to move far enough towards peace and cooperation when the West was often open to such things in the 1950s to 1970s.

China did much better, sticking to its own territory: the borders that almost all Chinese see as correct. Does not become a menace to the entire world when it does not submit to new borders that the USA wants to impose on it, as with the South China Sea. Or when the USA decided that it is unfit to rule what is undoubtedly Chinese territory, as with Tibet. Or when Western media drop all mention of the violent separatism in Xinjiang and claims that China's enforcement of peace is genocide; <https://mrgwydionmwilliams.quora.com/West-Reports-Only-Propaganda-on-Xinjiang>.

China remains authoritarian, but without being expansionist. And sadly, it remains to be seen if we can keep a decent society in our globalised world without an authoritarian state. One instance: both drug mules and rapist can be executed, meaning that the drugs problem is under control and Chinese women can safely walk alone at night. While living in Peterborough, I recall how after an office celebratory meal one of us had to insist on escorting a female Chinese colleague back to her car: it was simply not safe even in a nice middle-class part of town.

It also seems that sexual assaults on foreign women are pretty much unknown in China, whereas they can happen in broad daylight in other parts of Asia. And it's not specific to Leninism: Japan and Singapore also have tough policing and safe streets.

I'm still hopeful that Europe can get back to what it was before the New Right aberration. Even the USA might manage it, or maybe parts if it unbundles the union, which with Trump re-elected no longer seems absurd. We do better at fighting sexual harassment, and at women getting a fair share of the top political jobs. But for now China must be seen as a good example, which among other things means teaching people what's really happening in Tibet.

The Strange History of the Dalai Lamas

The specific merits of the Dalai Lama system are much weaker than those of Buddhism as a whole. I did a study: *Tibet and its God-King*, which I quoted from earlier. (<https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/m99-topic-menus-from-long-revolution-website/42-china/tibet/the-truth-about-the-dalai-lama/>.) I found clear evidence that holiness does not dwell there, nor wisdom either. If you want to place it somewhere else, that's a legitimate view. But all through Tibet's traditions, I found a *ring*

of untruth:

“The Dalai Lama is officially a single entity born fourteen times over the centuries. And murdered five or six times, to judge from the short lifetimes of Dalai Lamas who exercised real power...

“The first two ‘Dalai Lamas’ did not use the title and were regular abbots of a large Tibetan monastery. It was Number Three who raised the profile of the office, converting a lot of Mongolians to Lamistic Buddhism and also getting very political. He died in Mongolia of a ‘sudden illness’ after a visit to a Ming emperor. He was then deemed reincarnated as the great-grandson of a Mongol ruler, an event that could be seen as a Mongol take-over. This 4th Dalai Lama caused a Tibetan civil war and died young, died suspiciously.

“The next Dalai Lama was ‘found’ in another noble family, this one Tibetan. The Great 5th Dalai Lama worked with some Mongolian tribes to establish himself as Tibet’s ruler, but later accepted the new Manchu dynasty as rulers of the Empire. His death was kept a secret for many years by his deputies. His ‘reincarnation’ behaved unsuitably, openly consorting with women. The early death of this 6th Incarnation was probably not natural...

“Many people believe in rebirth as a general possibility, part of Hindu and Buddhist teaching and also some tribal or traditional religions. But the Tibetan system is much more specific: a particular young boy is ‘recognised’ as being the same person as some high lama who has recently died. No other branch of Buddhism claims to produce miracles so neatly and predictably.

“Claims for rebirth are apparently taken seriously. The ‘reborn’ child is supposed to recognise objects like a hair-brush or mirror belonging to the dead man, while ignoring similar objects that belonged to someone else. It would be an excellent test, if done honestly. The suspicion is that the selected child is first trained to claim those objects:..

“Children don’t usually remember anything that happened before they were 4, so the child himself might be sincere. But the parents would have to be in on the fraud, and they’d also have to be confident that the whole business of reincarnated lamas was a fraud. If it were real and you messed with it, you could expect terrible consequences in your next lifetime, or maybe sooner. So either the whole business is a cynical fraud by senior religious officials, or it is exactly what it claims to be. There is no middle ground.

“The pattern of suspicious early deaths also suggests that Lhasa had become like Christian Rome in some of its more corrupt periods, where the high clerical officials believed in nothing very much. In mediaeval times, it was commonly said ‘the closer to Rome, the less Christian’. In the case of the Lhasa rulers who may have murdered their God-King, they must have been confident that the next Dalai Lama wouldn’t be saying “didn’t you murder my previous body?” They’d need to take it for granted it was all nonsense, including the standard Buddhist notion of a ‘karmic burden’ for acts of murder and treachery...

“Senior monks who had had contact with various ‘tulku’ – there were about a thousand in traditional Tibet – might be expected to notice that the supposed reincarnation was a completely new person and could not in fact ‘remember’ anything without being trained and rehearsed. They’d lose faith in the system, which seems to be an oddity produced by the isolation of Tibetan Buddhism, where the monastic hierarchy and the aristocracy were deeply connected.”

Before it was skillfully repackaged for the Cold War, even though people imagined something hidden and wonderful in the lonely vastness of Western China, actual and visible Tibetan Buddhism fell short. I detailed earlier that even though the Shangri-la of James Hilton’s *Lost*

Horizon was based on Tibetan legends, what he imagined was not Buddhist, not set in the core Tibetan regions, and not respectful of ethnic Tibetans.

To get details of the Dalai Lama, I was able to get free internet access to some old US newspapers from the 1900s. At that time the USA took an intense interest in China. They hoped to convert the whole country to their version of Christianity. They were suspicious of what they saw among Buddhists, including installing a new Dalai Lama:

“Then the names of the three children whose births had been attended with miraculous signs were placed in an urn; each inscribed upon a slip in Chinese and Tibetan characters... the dalai lama was chosen by lot...

“There are not many more pathetic sights on earth than the sight of a dalai lama seated on his throne. For generations the grand lamas have been mere boys, many of them said to have died mysterious deaths.’ (*The Fort Wayne Evening Sentinel*, November 26th 1940)

“Newspapers mostly took their view from the Britain’s ‘Younghusband Expedition’ of 1904. The British invaders were unimpressed by the Dalai Lama, who had fled to Mongolia rather than sign the treaty the British wanted to impose:

“Lhasa itself is squalid and filthy, undrained, unpaved. Not a single house looks clean or cared for. The streets after rain are nothing but pools of stagnant water, frequented by pigs and dogs searching for refuse...

“Above all this squalor the Potula [sic] towers superbly. Its golden roofs shining in the sun like tongues of fire...

“Since the assumption of temporal power by the fifth Grand Lama in the middle of the seventeenth century, the whole history of the Tibetan hierarchy has been a record of bloodshed and intrigue. The fifth Grand Lama, the first to receive the title of Dalai, was a most unscrupulous ruler, who secured the temporal power by inciting the Mongols to invade Tibet, and received as his reward the Kingship. He then established his claim to the godhead by tampering with Buddhist history and writ. The sixth incarnation was executed by the Chinese on account of his profligacy. The seventh was deposed by the Chinese as privy to the murder of the Regent. After the death of the eighth of whom I can learn nothing, it would seem that the tables were turned, the Regents systematically murdered their charges, and the crime of the seventh Dalai Lama was visited upon four successive incarnations. The ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth all died prematurely, assassinated, it is believed, by their Regents...

“The country is governed on the feudal system. The monks are the overlords, the peasantry are their serfs. The poor are not oppressed. They and the small tenant farmers work ungrudgingly for their spiritual masters, to whom they owe a blind devotion...

“No doubt the Lamas employ spiritual terrorism to maintain their influence and preserve the temporal government in their hands, and when they speak of their religion being injured by our intrusion they are thinking, no doubt, of another unveiling of mysteries, the dreaded age of materialism and reason when, little by little, their ignorant serfs will be brought into contact with the facts of life.” (*The Ogden Standard*, November 12th 1904)” (Ibid.)

The British invasion had created turmoil in Tibetan politics. Since it took a year to travel from Beijing to Lhasa, the Chinese Imperial Administration knew it had to be autonomous. But it was not like Korea or Vietnam: countries that recognised the Chinese Emperor as a superior but ran their own politics. China’s last dynasty had non-Tibetan officials called Ambans sharing power with whichever Tibetans were in command at any given time. A similar system existed for

Xinjiang, Manchuria, and a portion of Mongolia known as Urga.

“The Qing imperial residents can be roughly compared to a European resident (also known as resident commissioners) in a protectorate (e.g. a British Indian princely state), the real rapport depending on historical circumstances rather than a general job description for every amban, while his authority was often very extensive, rather like a provincial governor.” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amban>.)

Supporters of the Dalai Lama cannot deny that these officials existed and were powerful. Mostly they leave them out, just as they neglect to mention Princess Wencheng as the main bringer of Buddhism to Tibet. Sometimes they will claim that these were not really Chinese, which willfully confuses two things that are distinct in Standard Chinese (Mandarin) but muddled in English. For today's Chinese, there are 56 nationalities within the civilisation-state that they call Zhongguo, and which is sometimes translated as 'Middle Kingdom'. The majority population and those with no other language or separate strong cultural tradition are known as Han. But the others mostly have no wish to be cut off from the wider civilisation-state. You find the same in Britain: a distinct majority of Welsh and a fading majority of Scots assert their non-English identity, but do not want to cut ties and become sovereign nations.

Rulers in Tibet mostly wanted to run their own show, but not to cut ties with the Chinese civilisation-state.

“A British force from India invaded Tibet [in 1903] on the pretext of opposing Tsarist Russian influence, which seems to have been marginal. The British in India probably wanted to detach at least Western Tibet from the Chinese Empire, but the British government back in London balked at this. British trade with the Han majority was considered much more important.

“The Chinese Central Government also made an effort to re-establish effective control, at first with the Amban (Chinese Imperial resident) working with the Dalai Lama:

“The circumstances surrounding the flight from L'hasa [sic] of the now deposed dalai lama are as follows:

“The dalai lama, following his wide wanderings, arrived at L'hasa in December with authority from Peking [Beijing] to take over the government from the provisional governors who were appointed following the invasion of the Holy City in 1904 by Colonel Sir Francis Edward Younghusband...

“The dalai lama was installed at the palace and monastery of Polasta [sic] amid popular demonstrations. The ruler, who was again given civil power at the head of their hierarchy, pardoned all the Tibetans who had given the oath to Colonel Younghusband, and all went well for a month, when the lama protested to the Chinese in charge of military affairs because of the excesses of the Chinese troops on the Sze Chuen [Sichuan] frontier, where they were sacking the monasteries and killing the monks. This protest served to stir up the whole question of the status of Tibet. The amban declared that it was a Chinese province, and said he would deal with the rebels as it pleased him to do. Other questions of authority arose, and finally the amban ordered to L'hasa 500 Chinese troops who were encamped on the outskirts of the capital. A few companies composed of the dalai lama's followers were hastily enrolled under the name of 'golden soldiers'. They opposed the Chinese soldiers, but, being indifferently armed, were shot down with much bloodshed. Meanwhile the dalai lama, with three of his ministers and sixty retainers, fled through a gate at the rear of the palace enclosure, and were fired upon as they escaped through the city.

“The dalai lama does not intend to appeal to the Indian government, his motive in coming to India... this way offers the shorted route to Peking [sic], where he can personally

lay his grievances before the Chinese throne.’ (The Galveston Daily News, February 7th 1910.)

“It’s a consistent pattern, a Dalai Lama inciting violence and then fleeing well away from the resultant danger. The same events are summarised in the Encyclopedia Britannica (1911 edition):

“In January 1908 the final instalment of the Tibetan indemnity was paid to Great Britain, and the Chumbi valley was evacuated. The Dalai Lama was now summoned to Peking, where he obtained the imperial authority to resume his administration in place of the provisional governors appointed as a result of the British mission. He retained in office the high officials then appointed, and pardoned all Tibetans who had assisted the mission. But in 1909 Chinese troops were sent to operate on the Sze-ch’uen frontier against certain insurgent lamas, whom they handled severely. When the Dalai Lama attempted to give orders that they should cease, the Chinese amban in Lhasa disputed his authority, and summoned the Chinese troops to enter the city. They did so, and the Dalai Lama fled to India in February 1910, staying at Darjeeling. Chinese troops followed him to the frontier, and he was deposed by imperial decree. The British government, in view of the apparent intention of China to establish effective suzerainty in Tibet, drew the attention of the government at Peking to the necessity of strictly observing its treaty obligations, and especially pointing out that the integrity of the frontier states of Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim must be respected. To the Dalai Lama, who had attempted to obtain British intervention at Peking, it was made clear that he personally had no claim to this, as the British government could only recognize the de facto government in Tibet.’

“Then as now, Eastern Tibet and Western Tibet are not clearly distinguished. The central Chinese government accepted Western Tibet as autonomous, but Eastern Tibet had been absorbed into various Chinese provinces, including Sichuan. In 1910 the Amban of Tibet was a man called Zhao Erfeng, the last Amban of Tibet. He was also acting viceroy of Sichuan province, two roles that would normally have been separate. Zhao Erfeng played a part in provoking the Wuchang Uprising in neighbouring Hubei Province, which led on to the fall of the Manchu dynasty.

“In 1911, Zhao Erfeng faced rebellion in Sichuan. According to Han Suyin, the main issue was control of a planned railway that would have linked Sichuan to the rest of China. He summoned troops from Wuchang, which was seen by rebels as an opportunity to rebel. This was the background to the Wuchang Uprising, the official start of the Xinhai Revolution (Chinese Revolution of 1911). Zhao tried to work with the rebels, but on 22nd December 1911 he was overthrown and beheaded.” (<https://labouraffairsmagazine.com/m-articles-by-topic/m99-topic-menus-from-long-revolution-website/42-china/tibet/the-truth-about-the-dalai-lama/>.)

China as a whole became chaotic. Some provinces declared independence, though this was more a view that the central government was unfit to rule than a wish to leave the wider civilisation-state. The Dalai Lama thought about claiming complete independence, but could not get British support:

“The British in India had continuous ambitions to add Tibet to their realm, at least as a protectorate. But the government in London took a wider view: Britain’s other interests in China were vastly more important than Tibet. Britain dominated Shanghai and had a privileged position in the enormous and populous Yangtse Valley – something that lasted in a reduced form until the ‘Amethyst Incident’ in 1949. Britain during the days of the pro-Western Chinese Republic thought it best not to antagonise Chinese public opinion by seizing Western Tibet. It did slip out of central government control, because the Han Chinese in Sichuan overthrew Zhao Erfeng, who was both Amban of Tibet and Sichuan governor. After he was killed, no one person was able to replace him...

“The Dalai Lama benefited from this general fragmentation of Western China (as indeed did the Communists twenty years later, during that portion of their Long March.) In the summer of 1912, the exiled Dalai Lama declared that Tibet was independent. His followers managed to drive out the Chinese army, which would no longer have had any strong reason to stay. But the Dalai Lama only secured control of Western Tibet: Eastern Tibet was ethnically mixed and mostly controlled by various non-Tibetan warlords. Tibet’s claim to independence was recognised only by another secessionist regime, in what was then Outer Mongolia.” (Ibid.)

This secessionist Mongolian state was initially traditionalist, But after a White Russian general took refuge there, pro-Bolshevik Mongols got Soviet help and took over. And wanted to join the Soviet Union, but that would have offended almost all Chinese. Mao recognised its independence in 1949, but it only got general recognition and UN membership in 1960. Of course China itself only got admitted in 1971, after Nixon dropped the absurd claim that the Taiwan exiles were the real China.

Tibet’s own ambiguity had been resolved in 1940, as I explained earlier. There had been tension before that, with the Panchen Lama challenging the Dalai Lama and being exiled. The Japanese also got involved:

“Observing that the Panchen Lama (though spiritually entitled to rule Tibet and Buddhism jointly with the Dalai Lama) would not fall in line with certain progressive political idea, a plot was engineered, with the result that the Panchen Lama was forced to flee Tibet in 1924.

“During the past decade he has lived in Manchuria and Mongolia. He is reputed to receive a subsidy of approximately \$150,000 [equivalent to more than 2 million in 2007 dollars] from the Chinese, who believe the money well spent in consideration for the extreme spiritual influence he exercises...

“Though he is somewhat obligated to the Chinese for their hospitality during his 10 years exile, the Japanese hold tantalisingly before him the promise of a great All-Asia Buddhist Empire – a Holy Roman Empire of the Orient – with himself as Supreme Pontiff, under the temporal protection of the Buddhist Emperor of Japan...

“As it happened, the 9th Panchen Lama died before he could return to Tibet. Died in 1937, the year the Sino-Japanese War started.... Since this Panchen Lama was only in his 50s, I can’t help wondering if his death was arranged. There was certainly a lot of murder and conspiracy in Republican China. Chiang Kai-Shek in his early days had shot and killed a political rival who was in hospital at the time.” (Ibid.)

New ‘incarnations’ of both High Lamas were installed in 1940, with Central Government recognition and participation. This lasted till 1949, when the Lhasa government expelled the Kuomintang officials and made another bid for independence. Mao sent an army, but respected the autonomy that was part of the tradition. Autonomy that included legal slavery and serfdom, which lasted until the Dalai Lama fled or was abducted in 1959.

The current Dalai Lama has never merited the attention he has been getting. And when he finally dies, I expect the whole absurd system to lose significance. I’d expect little support or respect for the successor he has arranged to get chosen; particularly if they are not ethnic Tibetan. Meantime Beijing will appoint someone loyal as their own Dalai Lama, and the thing will deservedly dwindle and matter little.

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Many more articles on-line, giving a new vision of socialism:

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