



The UN Community stood by as Tibet was swallowed by its huge communist neighbor China.

Can the Dalai Lama's China talks succeed?

Many of Tibet's 110,000 exiles see this as progress toward their return home. But others are irked by how much the Dalai Lama has conceded just to get a seat at the table.

Long before Communist China's army entered Tibet in the early 1950s, vast tracts of Tibetan land had been absorbed by China into regions such as Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan. In 1959, when the Dalai Lama fled to India, China gained control over what was left of Tibet and in 1965 turned this area into a province called the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). The Dalai Lama now lays claim to all traditional Tibetan land, both TAR and the areas seized by China. But many say this demand is unrealistic and he should be flexible.

A Cornered Dog May Bite

But not everyone is happy with the concessions being made to the Chinese. Students around him nod and say they are willing to die for their cause. Dhondup Dorjee, 24, explains why. "It's not that I believe in violence," he says sharply, "but even a street dog, if he's cornered, will bite you."

Not Always Nonviolent

With the Tibetan struggle iconized by the smiling, benevolent face of the Dalai Lama, such sentiments may surprise some. Few people realize that the Tibetans have tried violence against the Chinese before. Between the mid-'50s and 1972, Tibetans waged a covert war against China from Mustang in Nepal with the assistance of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

Thousands of Tibetan guerillas were trained at a base called Dhumra, or "the garden," at Camp Hale in Colorado and also in Saipan. They were then parachuted into Tibet via Thailand or were smuggled in over land from Nepal.

Lhasang Tsering, 52, an ex-president of TYC, was a young participant in ST CIRCUS in its dying days. He says it is time to reopen that chapter because the "very survival of Tibet is threatened. The single biggest factor," he says, "is China's policy of population transfer into Tibet."

A Culture Overwhelmed

China is swamping Tibet with Han Chinese in an attempt to integrate it into the mainland. To Tibetans this is the most potent threat China has hurled at their existence—more than the million who have died from Chinese policies, the destruction of more than 6,000 Buddhist monasteries, the arrest and torture of Tibetan monks, the denuding of Tibetan forests, and the stationing of nuclear weapons and waste dumps in Tibet.

Samdhong Rinpoche, 64, is a monk and prime minister of the Tibetan government-in-exile. He estimates that 7 million Han Chinese now live in Tibet, almost a hundred times the number claimed by China. There are only 2.3 million Tibetans.

Tsering points to the building of a railroad into Tibet that will be used to flood the region with Han Chinese even as the Chinese are talking with the Dalai Lama as proof that negotiations will fail.

Such high-mindedness is lost on Phuntsok. While professing deep respect for the spiritual leadership of the Dalai Lama and monks such as Rinpoche, Phuntsok says their moral convictions make them unsuitable political leaders.

"I want to ask the Dalai Lama: 'If you could achieve Tibetan independence in a day by killing 100 Chinese would you do it?' If he says no, he cannot be the leader of the Tibetan people. He values his philosophies more. Monks are good people but perhaps too good for the raw politics consuming us," he says.

India Backs Away

Recently India, too, has forsaken the Tibetans to pursue its own interests. Though India remains a safe harbor for Tibetan refugees, most of whom live in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, and hosts the Tibetan government-in-exile in Dharamsala, New Delhi has been distancing itself from the Tibetan struggle as it builds closer ties with Beijing.

By accepting China's limited definition of Tibet and by saying TAR was Chinese territory and not an autonomous region, India was, in effect, accepting China's key positions on the issue.

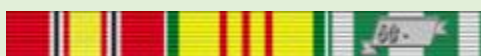
A Cat and Mouse Game?

Looking past Dharamsala's main street crowded with tourists eager to taste Tibetan mystic and the stores crammed with prayer beads and holy books that service them, Tsering says the struggle has never been lonelier.

Tsering and Phuntsok acknowledge an insurgency against China has little chance of success. But pointing to East Timor they say an insurgency could take advantage of internal discord in China if and when it surfaces.

The TYC has little knowledge and fewer means to act on its ideas. Yet it remains a wild card in an increasingly complicated web of power politics. Phuntsok himself throws open the question as to whether the TYC is a stick the Dalai Lama uses to contrast with his own carrot. If so, the message the Dalai Lama wants to send the Chinese is clear-if you don't deal with reasonable me before I die, you might be left having to deal with these young Turks.

Above article published in In "These Times " on Dec 1, 2003. Jehangir Pocha, a native of Bombay, is an international journalist based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. "In These Times" is a national, biweekly magazine of news and opinion published in Chicago. For 27 years, *In These Times* has provided coverage of the labor movement, environment, feminism, grassroots politics, minority communities and the media. *In These Times* features award-winning investigative reporting about corporate malfeasance and government wrongdoing, insightful analysis of national and international affairs, and sharp cultural criticism about events and ideas that matter.



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