



## **Two suns in the Asian sky**

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India scores over China in its respect for the deeper and more important aspects of human values, says Claude Arpi

Compared to China, India is shining in the domain of human values. Beijing may loudly proclaim that its objective is "peaceful rise of China", but it is doubtful that it will manage to gain the respect it hopes for. Mao too had a dream: To see China overtake the West. His dream may come true during the 2008 Beijing Olympics Games if China wins more gold medals than the United States. But this time, contrary to Mao's earlier attempts, it will be a peaceful overtaking! However, even if this succeeds, another Chinese objective would have not been attained: To gain the international community's respect. And for the Chinese leaders, this loss of face is as important as their meteoric rise to the top. The Chinese have historically been extremely sensitive about the image they project outside. It reminds me of the incident when President Jiang Zemin visited Switzerland a few years ago. As he arrived for a function, a group of young Swiss citizens shouted slogans: "Chinese out of Tibet!" It was a rather mild demonstration and any other visiting dignitary would have gone his way without even noticing it. However, Jiang Zemin was so annoyed by the protest that during a banquet in his honour by the Swiss President, he refused to eat or to speak. Finally, at the end of the dinner, he stood up and said: "Switzerland has lost a friend." The Swiss Government had nothing to do with the demonstration, except for the fact that like in any democratic nation, its citizens were allowed to voice their concern, as long as they did not break any law. This was not appreciated by the then strong man of the Chinese

Communist Party, who felt he had lost face in a foreign country. Probably, the Chinese President still saw himself as the Son of Heaven (as ancient Emperors called themselves) and China as the Middle Kingdom, the centre of the world. Unfortunately, successive generations of Chinese leaders have forgotten that one has to be respectable to be respected. One of the many factors that will prevent China to become a great power (even if they win more medals than the US in 2008), is their disrespect for democracy, human rights and other accepted human values. The latest example is their arm-twisting of Google to accept the censorship of their Chinese site, google.cn. Chinese Google users will be unable to access websites containing "politically sensitive material". Amongst the banned topics are: Tibet and its exiled leader, the Dalai Lama; Taiwan, the rebel Island and Tiananmen Square which saw the student protest movement crushed by tanks in 1989. Even though Yahoo and Microsoft had done it earlier, the censorship by Google has created more ripples; after all, the company's corporate motto is 'Don't be evil'. Google used to be proud to be "a different kind of company, (it) means more than the products we make and the business we're building; it means making sure that our core values inform our conduct in all aspects of our lives." Whatever the morality of these companies, this incident will not refurbish China's image. Another incident, which shows Beijing is becoming a more and more oppressive, occurred after the Dalai Lama recently declared that he felt ashamed of Tibetans wearing skins of endangered animal species as an ornament on their traditional dress. This strong reaction of the Tibetan leader is explained by the well-known secret that some Tibetans were behind the trading of the skins of wild animals. As a result of his appeal, a few people assembled on January 29 in Rekong county of Eastern Tibet and burned some skins of endangered species, mainly otters and foxes. "The furs used to trim clothes are collected and partially burned in front of the owner and onlookers," the London-based Tibet Information Network reported. The Chinese authorities should have been

pleased that the Tibetans were finally complying with environmental laws, but as the movement amplified they banned the burning of a stockpile of wildlife skins in the main courtyard of Rongwo monastery in the same county. Though at the beginning "the authorities' response has been restrained", they later reacted violently. Police and paramilitary troops were deployed in Rekonng city and cadres were verbally warned that "their participation in public events linked to the campaign would lead to their expulsion from service". Strange that a nation which wants to lead Asia has to punish its citizens when they decide to abide by the law! It is true that Tibet is a sensitive subject for the Beijing leadership, but why can't they understand that their image is badly effected when they behave in such an irresponsible manner? This brings to mind another anecdote involving again Jiang Zemin. An acquaintance told me that a few years back he was called for an unscheduled meeting with the Chinese President who told him: "I am not a tyrant; why do people say that I am a tyrant?" He did not understand that as long he did not show any respect for values which are cherished by the rest of humanity, he ran the risk of being called a tyrant. This is where India, despite its lacunae and certain non-shining features of its democracy, really shines compared to China. China's image of a totalitarian nation will remain unless Beijing introduces a minimum amount of religious and civic freedom for its citizens. And its leaders will continue to loose face. One could multiply the examples, whether it is Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the Dalai Lama-recognised 11th Panchen Lama missing since May 1995, whether it is Tenzin Delek, a reincarnate Lama from Lithang in Kham Province of Western Tibet who was arrested and charged with alleged involvement in a series of bomb blast incidents and condemned to death without proper trial, just because his popularity had risen very high after his commendable social work; or whether it is five monks of Drepung Monastery who were arrested in November 2005 and are since missing because they protested against "patriotic education" sessions in their monastery - the list is

long. How can Beijing complain about being called 'tyrants' when they are not ready to respect basic human values? The latest news is even more worrisome. When the Dalai Lama's envoy and his team reached Beijing a few days back, the Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang declared that "no special envoy" was in China. He said that he had only heard that "people with tight connections to the Dalai Lama (a Tibetan spiritual leader)" were visiting China "to learn about Chinese policies, see friends and personally observe changes in Tibet under Chinese rule". Knowing the tremendous sacrifice made by the Dalai Lama when he accepted a compromise - Tibet would not be an independent entity, but would be offered genuine autonomy within the PRC - the spokesman's statement is one more example of Beijing's irresponsible stance. It shows how the Dalai Lama, who has been hailed the world over for his peace overtures, and has had the courage to take a decision contrary to the aspirations of his people, is being treated. Although Beijing has often promised visiting Western leaders to sincerely start a dialogue with the Dalai Lama, the existence of such a dialogue is today denied. Can a great power be so untrustworthy? China might become a great economic power, but its leaders will have to continue to hide their face in shame on questions of ethics. India's moral standing in the world is much higher, though it can't be a consolation for returning without medals from the next Olympics.