



China's Weakness: The Tibetan and Uygur 'Nationalities' Areas

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A SYMPTOMATIC LAPSPUS

It was very symptomatic. As the People's Republic of China began to celebrate the 60th anniversary of its founding, a 'monthly report card' released by the Ministry of Home Affairs mentioned the completion of road construction 'on the Indo-Tibet border'.

During a media conference, Home Minister P. Chidambaram read the written report: "On the Indo-Tibet border, work on construction of 10 roads totaling 196 km is under progress. 45.27 km of formation works and 4.77 km of surfacing works were completed in September." That the Minister himself referred to the 'Indo-Tibet border' shows how deeply the fact that Tibet has been the Indian border for

millennia is anchored into the Indian psyche¹. In any case, whatever name the Government of India uses to refer to its international border in the north is anecdotal; the fact remains that Tibet strategically occupies a special place for the defence of the Indian frontiers.² The ministries of Home or External Affairs would perhaps prefer to erase the word 'Tibet' from their vocabulary, but the Roof of the World can not be wished away so easily.

The 'restricted' report, *History of the Conflict with China in 1962* published by the Historical Division of the Ministry of Defence makes it clear that the traumatic (at least for India)³ conflict with China has its origin in the occupation of the Tibetan plateau by the Chinese People's Liberation Army in 1950. It is simple

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¹ It was soon rectified by S.A. Rizvi, an officer on special duty in the Ministry who issued a statement: "It is clarified that an inadvertent error had crept in, which is regretted. The reference was to the 'India-China border'."

² The same Ministry of Home Affairs posts its Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force (ITBP) to man Indian northern borders. The ITBP website explains: "The ITBP was conceived in October 1962. Presently ITBP is deployed on Border guarding duties from the Karakoram Pass in Ladakh to Diphu La in Arunachal Pradesh covering 3,488 kms of the India-China Border and manning Border Outposts on altitudes ranging from 9000' to 18500' in the Western, Middle & Eastern Sector of the India-China Border."

to understand: India for centuries had a pacifist and non-violent neighbour whose civilization was turned towards spiritual enlightenment. Suddenly a new occupant arrived and began to aggressively spread a new ideology on the Roof of the World. By occupying the most strategic location of the planet, the new regime in Beijing was then in a position to 'dominate' the Indian subcontinent; this with obvious consequences for the Indian piedmont.

The 1962 Report explained: "Towards the end of 1950, China militarily occupied Tibet. The geo-strategic scenario underwent a sea change. It was felt in many quarters in India that the new situation carried within itself serious security implications to the areas bordering Tibet. There was also a demand that India should militarily intervene in Tibet. That could help Tibet to preserve its independence, and nip in the bud the security threat to India which was likely to emerge from the military occupation of Tibet by China. But China had invaded Lhasa with well-trained, well-armed and well-equipped troops. Initially their number was not very large, but by January 1951, 10,000-20,000 Chinese troops had concentrated in and around Chamdo. By the end of October 1951, about 1,000 Chinese troops had reached Lhasa and a larger number of them, both infantry and mounted, were on their way to the Tibetan capital. India was not in a position to throw a challenge to them.

With bulk of the Indian army committed on the borders with Pakistan and for internal troubles, no more than one battalion or so could be spared. Even if more troops could have been made available, their transportation to Tibet and continuance of supplies to them would have posed enormous problems. As against the Chinese troops,⁴ Indian soldiers were neither trained nor equipped for operations at such heights. In fact, India did not possess any military option in Tibet at that time due to logistic difficulties."

The rest is known: The Tibetan uprising in March 1959 was followed by the flight of the Tibetan spiritual and temporal leader, the Dalai Lama. A couple of weeks later, he took refuge in India. Three years later, China invaded part of the Indian territory in NEFA and Ladakh creating a stigma still present in the Indian psyche. Today, despite countless rounds of talks - first in 1960 and later from 1981 onwards, the border issue between India and China is far from being resolved; in fact the positions are so far apart that it is difficult to envisage a solution in the near future. Tibet remains at the centre of the vexed issue.

THE LEADERSHIP'S NERVOUSNESS

Recent troubles on the northern borders of India, repeated Chinese intrusions into Indian territory, veiled threats to 'split' India, an aggressive stance on Arunachal Pradesh show that today, the Chinese leadership is nervous, very nervous. One could ask, why?

One of the main reasons is that the empire is unstable. The Emperors, the Sons of Heaven have always been obsessed with 'chaos'. From their point of view it is logical, Heaven can withdraw its Mandate at any time when 'chaos' prevails⁵. The present incumbent, President Hu Jintao is no different. In most of his recent speeches, he has emphasized on 'stability' and 'a harmonious society'. But is China a harmonious society? Today, China is fast changing; becoming a superpower, emerging as the Number 2 power in the world. At the same time, the Middle Kingdom is becoming a more complex and unmanageable entity.

Certain imbalances⁶ render the Chinese empire extremely unstable. Tibet and its border with India remains the bone of contention between the two emerging superpowers. It is also China's Achilles heel as the present leadership is unable to sort out the Tibetan issue, even though their interlocutor, the Dalai Lama is a very reasonable person.

³ On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the founding of the PRC, Chinese television screened a documentary on the political developments since 1949. It did not mention the India-China war of 1962, though it discussed several other foreign policy issues. For China, it is probably a detail. *The Times of India* reported: "CCTV's omission of the 1962 war is significant because it comes soon after *Global Times*, a newspaper close to the Communist Party, named Jawaharlal Nehru and Rabindranath Tagore, among the 60 foreigners who played a key role in the making of modern China. There have been other hints that China wants to avoid a brush with India at this stage."

⁴ There is no proof of this. The Chinese soldiers have never been known to be great warriors, though they were used to hardship during the struggle against the Japanese and the Nationalists.

⁵ The Chinese word for 'chaos', *luan* means the condition of a society falling into a disordered situation or an uncontrolled state.

⁶ For example, the difference in development between the coastal areas and the inner land or in 'minorities' areas like Tibet and Xinjiang.

THE DUAL MANTRA: STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT

The leadership has been aware of the issue of 'instability' for a long time, but has been unable to take any corrective measures. 'Stability in ethnic areas' has been central to the Chinese Central Government policies. The leadership in Beijing (and perhaps even more the PLA) understands the importance of stability to 'defend China's borders'. Soon after the Tiananmen massacre, in October 1989, the "Summary of the Central Politburo Standing Committee's Forum on Tibet Work" had pointed out two main issues 'to firmly grasp the Tibet work': stability of the political situation and economic development. Since then the dual mantra has been constantly repeated, but 'stability' has never been achieved and economic development benefits primarily the Han population.

During the 11th Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) held in early March 2008 in Beijing⁷, President Hu Jintao met a few 'Tibetan' delegates and told them: "Tibet's stability has to do with the entire country's stability, Tibet's safety has to do with the entire country's safety." Could he foresee what was coming?

RIOTS ON THE TIBETAN PLATEAU

On 10 March 2008, 500 monks of Drepung monastery began a peaceful protest in Lhasa; they were immediately tear-gassed and beaten by the People's Armed Police (PAP)⁸. Ten monks were arrested and the monastery surrounded by the PAP; the water supply was cut off. The same day, 14 monks from Sera monastery held a protest in the Jokhang Central Cathedral in Lhasa; they waved Tibetan flags. They were immediately taken away by the local police. Minor protests were also reported from Amdo region (today in Qinghai province). The next day, 600 monks from Sera monastery marched peacefully to the Tibetan capital. They were also tear-gassed by police and many were arrested. Again, the water supply of the monastery was cut off and restaurants in the area closed.

⁷ A few days before the beginning of the riots in Tibet.

⁸ According to the Chinese *White Paper on Defence*: "As a component of China's armed forces and subordinate to the State Council, the People's Armed Police Force (PAPF) is under the dual leadership of the State Council and the CMC. The PAPF consists of the internal security force and various police forces. The border public security, firefighting and security guard forces are also components of the PAPF. The PAPF is charged with the fundamental task of safeguarding national security, maintaining social stability and ensuring that the people live and work in peace and contentment. Routine guard duties refer to duties the PAPF performs to maintain internal security, which are mostly carried out by the internal security force. The basic tasks are: to guard against all forms of attempted attacks and sabotage; protect designated individuals and facilities; ensure the security of important international and national conferences and large-scale cultural and sports events; protect important airports, radio stations, and key and confidential units, and vital places in such sectors as state economy and national defense; protect important bridges and tunnels; ensure the security of prisons and detention houses; and maintain public order in state-designated large and medium-sized cities or specific zones." The PAP has a strength of 6,60,000 personnel.

14 March 2008 will remain etched in the history of protests in Tibet. It was subsequently termed 'the 3/14 incident' by Beijing to make it sound like a terrorist attack against the People's Republic of China.

In the morning, about one hundred monks from Ramoche monastery began to demonstrate against the arrest of the monks on the previous days. They were stopped and beaten by the police. This infuriated the Tibetan by-passers. From then on, the situation went out of control. A large scale demonstration involving tens of thousands of people led to a confrontation between Tibetans and the PAP. On that day, the ban on firing weapons was lifted. Police and the PAP were free to shoot at will.

The unrest occurred as many local Party cadres were attending the annual National People's Congress in Beijing. From Beijing, the Tibetan Autonomous authorities immediately blamed the Dalai Lama. Even Premier Wen Jiabao accused the Tibetan leader of having masterminded the violence to sabotage the forthcoming Olympic Games. This was denied by the Dalai Lama who issued a statement, asking for an independent enquiry into the events. He spoke of "an independent international body, to investigate the unrest and its underlying causes, as well as allowing the media and international medical teams to visit the affected areas." There was no answer from Beijing.

Unlike at the end of the 1980's, when the protests were limited to Central Tibet, this time, the unrest spread to all Tibetan inhabited areas, more particularly in the Eastern and North-eastern provinces of Kham and Amdo. According to Tibetan sources, some 200 Tibetans lost their lives and thousands were arrested. Several Chinese were reported to have been killed on 14 March. Quasi-chaos prevailed for two months on the Tibetan plateau. What should worry the leaders in Beijing is their own incapacity to solve the Tibetan issue through dialogue and adjustment. Force is inevitably used, rendering the situation more inextricable year over year.

Wang Lixiong, a well-known Chinese author married to the famous Tibetan blogger Woesser, wrote an article *Roadmap of Tibetan Independence*⁹ in which he expressed the opinion that the violent reaction of the Chinese leadership only creates fresh problems for Beijing. He made this judicious remark: "Street protests with violence similar to the '3.14' [14 March 2008] incident repeatedly occur in Mainland China. The tactics used to handle these incidents have already been very obtusely unskillful. But if the same tactics – news blockade, passively cooling down, not stimulating further conflicts, cracking down the hardcore while providing comfort to others, and finding scapegoats in lower level bureaucracy to calm down the anger – were used to deal with the March incident, the chain reactions throughout the Tibetan area that we had seen would not have been forthcoming." Why was it not done in Tibet?

UNREST IN XINJIANG

Some eighteen months later, it was the turn of Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang (*The New Dominion* in Chinese), to be in the news. On 5 July, 2009, violence erupted resulting in at least 200 people dead and some 1,000 wounded. What triggered the bloodiest-ever riot in the restive region remains unclear. Apparently, it started as a peaceful protest which later turned violent. Uygur students were protesting against the killings of two Uygurs by Han Chinese in a factory in South China. A crowd (between 1,000 to 3,000 people according to agencies' reports), angered by the brutal action of PAP, started overturning vehicles, attacking houses and clashing with the police. A few hours later, Chinese TV began showing images of the riots. A ferocious repression had begun. Once again, the State was unable to manage a minor incident which ended up in serious disturbances. A parallel with Tibet was immediately made by analysts.

The Government's actions were justified by Wu Nong, a spokesperson for the Xinjiang provincial government, who stated that 260 vehicles were attacked or set on fire and 203 houses damaged. These figures, as well as the number of dead or wounded, seem extraordinarily high compared to the number of participants. Tensions are not a new phenomenon in a province which has been flooded (like Tibet) by millions of Han settlers over the past decades. Part

of the Republic of East Turkistan till 1949, the Uygurs, Muslims of Turkish origin have sporadically demonstrated their resentment against Han colonization. But with the overwhelming majority of Urumqi's 2.3 million inhabitants being Chinese, tensions are exacerbated.

The Communist Party's local satraps were quick to blame the incident on a 'foreign' hand. Xinjiang CCP boss and Politburo member, Wang Lequan declared that the riot in Urumqi showed the violent and terrorist nature of the separatist *World Uyghur Congress* leader Rebiya Kadeer. One remembers that when unrest had erupted in Tibet in March 2008, the Dalai Lama was similarly called a 'wolf in monk's dress' by Zang Qingli, the Tibet Party Chief.

In an interview with *Xinjiang TV*, Wang got carried away: "The terrorist, separatist and extremist forces cheated the people to participate in the so-called jihad". Though CCTV footages showed ordinary citizens rather than hardcore jihadis, Wang's conclusion was: "all Party members should take the strongest measures to deal with the enemies' attempt at sabotage and keep regional stability".

Two days after the incident, Beijing endorsed Wang's position. *The People's Daily* commented: "The 63-year-old Kadeer is likened to the Dalai Lama – the so-called 'peaceful demonstration' was staged on the Urumqi streets in the form of the most inhumane atrocities too horrible to look at." It was categorically denied by Kadeer who in an op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal* affirmed: "I unequivocally condemn the use of violence by Uygurs during the demonstration as much as I do China's use of excessive force against protestors." This is the crux of the matter. Since decades, in Xinjiang as in Tibet, there is more hatred and distrust between the local population and the Hans than the 'compact harmony' cited by a Chinese leader.

The Urumqi events were associated with the unrest in Tibet in 2008. Sixty years after the founding of the PRC and their so-called 'liberation' of Tibet and Xinjiang, the two provinces are under undeclared martial law.¹⁰ For Beijing, both provinces are strategically important region as they would be the physical bases for any land or missile attack against India; further Xinjiang is needed for the transit of oil

⁹ Wang Lixiong's essay, *Roadmap of Tibetan Independence* is available on <http://www.tpprc.org/archive/88-roadmap-of-tibetan-independence.html>.

¹⁰ Foreigners were banned from visiting Tibet a few days before and after the 60th anniversary celebrations. Since July's incident, Xinjiang has no internet facilities.

and gas from Central Asia. The riots which erupted in spring 2008 at different places on the Tibetan plateau and in July 2009 in Xinjiang demonstrate the precariousness of the Chinese defence preparedness. The leadership in Beijing, often cut off from the situation on the ground, seems unable to cope with the situation.

JEALOUS OF INDIA?

The recent increased tensions with India are due to many factors. One is the instability of the 'ethnic areas' which makes China nervous. There is also some jealousy vis-à-vis India who has succeeded in its democratic experiment despite the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of the nation. China might be 20 years or 30 years ahead of India in its infrastructure development or the modernization of its armed forces, but China has failed as a multi-cultural nation. Even if Beijing tries today to play the Kashmir card¹¹, Article 370 – whether one believes that it is the right thing for Kashmir or not – concedes more autonomy than the Dalai Lama is asking for Tibet today. The Chinese media recently wrote of India: "Proud of its 'advanced political system', India feels superior to China. However, it faces a disappointing domestic situation which is unstable compared with China's"¹², but this analysis is absolutely incorrect. The democratic process in India is a security valve¹³ which does not exist in the Middle Kingdom.

The *China Brief* of the Jamestown Foundation reported in its June issue:

"Widespread anger at the callousness, corruption and other misdemeanours of cadres, particularly those at the level of counties and below, is deemed a main factor behind the tens of thousands of riots and protests that occur every year. The latest such disaster, where some 10,000 peasants from Shishou town, Hubei Province clashed last week with police due to the latter's alleged cover-up of the suspicious death of a local resident, has followed upon the heels of similar incidents in Hainan, Guizhou and Yunnan the past year. In all these cases, law officers and other grassroots personnel offered protection to the rich and powerful instead of helping citizens who were victimized by corrupt cadres or triad elements."¹⁴

¹¹ For example, by granting people of Kashmir origin visas on a separate sheet and not in their passport.

¹² *The People's Daily*, June 11, 2009, *India's unwise military moves*, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90777/90851/6676088.html>

¹³ Despite its own aberrations, like leaders installing statues of themselves, or shifting from one party to another with every monsoon.

¹⁴ *China Brief*, Volume: 9 Issue: 13, June 24, 2009.

¹⁵ This essay is available at [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/books/single?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=35453&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=7&cHash=c647881d48](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/books/single?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=35453&tx_ttnews[backPid]=7&cHash=c647881d48)

Countless cases like these are reported by the local media every year. The main issue is that there is no 'valve' (such as regular elections) for the people to vent their anger, their frustration or their just demands.

While an authoritarian regime facilitates faster building of roads, airports or new cities, a one-Party system undermines the healthy development of the State in many other fields. One of these is long-term stability, which has serious military and strategic implications.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF CHINA?

Will the Party able to win its battle against instability? The problem in China is that the Party knows only one way to deal with all issues, to use the 'barrel of the cannon'. This is partly due to the importance of the PLA in the Party's affairs. As Willy Lam of the *Jamestown Foundation* in an essay entitled *China's Quasi-Superpower Diplomacy: Prospects and Pitfalls*¹⁵, noted: "The PLA's clout, meanwhile, has been augmented because of its role in not only bolstering China's global reach but also suppressing an estimated 100,000 cases of protests, riots and disturbances that break out annually. Unlike military forces in most countries, the PLA is a 'party army', not a state army. This means that it is answerable to only a handful of top CCP cadres such as Hu, who also require the top brass's backing in order to maintain the pre-eminence of his own faction. ... The CCP leadership's refusal to give up Maoist norms such as the "party's absolute leadership over the armed forces" and "the synthesis of [the requirements of] peace and war" has dented the global appeal of the China model – and detracted from the viability of Beijing's quasi-superpower diplomacy."

A CHINESE REPORT

Interestingly, a report prepared by a Chinese think-tank, *Open Constitution Initiative* or *Beijing Gongmeng Consulting* on the 2008 riots in Tibet is an eye-opener. It entirely contradicts the Party's official version of the events. The authors, Li Kun, Huang Li, Li Xiang and Wang Hongzhe are lawyers "committed to building a modernized China and promoting human rights, democracy, and rule of law in China." The

lawyers first point out 'major errors in government policy' after the March–April 2008 protests. One was 'over-propagandizing of violence; another, encouragement of racist sentiment towards Tibetans: "The excessive response of the government all over Tibet was to regard every tree and blade of grass as a potential enemy soldier."

According to them, this further strained the relations between the local Tibetans and the Han migrants. One of their conclusions is: "Understanding is a precondition for discussion, unity and development. If the promotion of healthy development in Tibetan areas is truly desired then there must be a change in thinking and an adjustment in thinking behind the current nationality theories and policies."

Regarding 'stability', the lawyers' conclusions are lucid: "Due to the special nature of the political environment in Tibetan areas, 'stability' in the state's Tibet policies has special significance. The think tank considers that, 'If there is not a stable social environment, then all talk of development is empty'. Even though 'development and stability' are the two trains of thought for government work in ethnic areas, in the actual exercise of power, 'stability' takes on an overwhelming importance." The problem, according to the Report, is that "there are many people who have learned how to use stability to protect themselves."¹⁶

A similar conclusion was arrived at in the 70,000 character petition sent by the previous Panchen Lama to Premier Zhou Enlai in 1962, for which the former spent 17 years in jail. Interestingly, Xi Zhongxun, a Vice-Premier and Secretary General of the State Council in the 1960s who, was the contact between the Party and the Panchen Lama, had prepared a report for the State Council about the Panchen Lama's letter to Zhou. Xi Zhongxun was dismissed and charged with "accommodating with the Panchen." Later he was accused of disloyalty to Chairman Mao and purged.¹⁷

It is ironic that the secret journal of former Premier Zhao Ziyang, published on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the student's massacre, praises the parliamentary democracy system as the only way for

China to solve its problems of corruption and the growing gap between the rich and poor (and one could add the frequent 'people's riots'). For decades, 'upholding social stability' has been the core concern of the CCP. For China today, there is no reason to look at its southern neighbour in a patronizing way: India's example proves that a multi-party rule (even if there are far too many parties) ultimately makes a State stable.

THE DISSENTING VOICES

An interesting aspect which should not be neglected in any study of the geo-strategic importance of China's 'border areas' are the dissenting voices in China. They may be of little significance today, but there is no doubt that the present regime cannot remain deaf forever. A characteristic of the quality of these voices – one may agree or disagree with them – is that they are knowledgeable about the situation in Tibet and their reasoning makes sense.

One of these is Zhang Boshu, who soon after the riots of March–April 2008 wrote an essay on *The Way to Resolve the Tibet Issue*¹⁸. Zhang Boshu is a professor at the Philosophy Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. Zhang's first question is, "How did the Tibet issue arise"? He believes that this problem plaguing the Party for the past 50 years was created "by the Chinese Communist Party itself as the ruler of China". Skipping over the relations between Tibet and China during the Yuan Dynasty and Qing Dynasty, he states: "what is most important is that from 1912 onwards, Tibet was for a long period in a *de facto* state of independence. That situation continued until 1951 when the Tibet local government¹⁹ signed an agreement with the Beijing Central Government – the Seventeen Point Agreement on the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet."²⁰

Zhang terms the 1951 Agreement as moderate and constructive. He considers it to be an earlier avatar of the present *One Country, Two Systems* scheme (in force in Hong Kong, for example).

Zhang places the beginning of the present dispute between Tibet and China, in the mid-fifties when "Mao Zedong's utopian socialist social

¹⁶ Xu Zhiyong, the co-founder of Gongmeng was himself arrested for a few weeks after the publication of the report.

¹⁷ Xi Zhongxun is the father of Xi Jinping, the Chinese Vice-President and member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the CCP. Xi Jinping will probably become the next President when Hu Jintao retires in 2012, though it was recently reported that Xi Jinping has not been elevated (as expected) to the all-powerful Central Military Commission.

¹⁸ His essay is available on <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2008/05/zhang-boshu-the-way-to-resolve-the-tibet-issue/>.

¹⁹ The Dalai Lama's government.

²⁰ It can be found on the author's website http://www.claudearpi.net/maintenance/uploaded_pics/1951AgreementonMeasuresforthePeacefulLiberationofTibet.pdf

transformation began to accelerate". He says that "ripples spread from the Chinese interior to Chengdu and the Tibetan areas of Sichuan, Yunnan, Qinghai, and Gansu Provinces". He points out that in these Tibetan areas - not covered by the 17-Point Agreement²¹ - forced 'democratic reforms' and 'socialist transformation' created resentment amongst the local population. The result was that the leaders in Beijing stirred up dissatisfaction and created resistance among the Tibetan people; in turn, this led to the 1959 'rebellion'.

Zhang adds: "Chinese of my age grew up hearing songs like 'The Red Sun is rising above the snowy mountains' and seeing movies like 'Serfs'. In those days we really believed that under the leadership of the Communist Party 'the serfs have been liberated' and were living happy lives. Later, after reading a lot of historical materials, I learned that there were many untruths in the propaganda." The blame for the increasing resentment of the Tibetan people squarely lay with the party: "The dictatorship system of the Communist Party, the arrogance and ignorance of leaders, and the extreme leftist policies pursued by them in the Tibetan areas brought terrible disasters to both the religious and lay people of Tibet."

The philosophy professor then quotes at length the already-mentioned 70,000 character memorandum sent by the Panchen Lama to Premier Zhou Enlai. Zhang Boshu argues that historically some senior Party officials had different perspectives on the Tibetan issue.²² With the economic opening in the 1990's, known as the Years of Reform, the Chinese economy grew quickly: "The overall economic level of Tibet has improved considerably as a result. However, the political structure has remained the same as before with the Party exercising control over political, economic, cultural, and religious affairs just as before. An autonomous region in name, but in actual fact, autonomy was in the same lamentable state as before."

Zhang concludes: "The core of the Tibet issue has not been truly solved, and under the new social conditions a variety of new problems has arisen." According to Zhang, the worst is the all encompassing control on religious affairs. Another wrong policy, according to Zhang is the constant demonizing of the Dalai Lama. Zhang admits:

²¹ This is not the opinion of the Tibetans who believed that the Agreement includes all inhabited Tibetan speaking areas.

²² It is still probably the case today.

²³ Such as the Tibet Autonomous Region, the Qinghai Province, the Gansu Province, the Sichuan Province, the Yunnan Province, the CPC Tibet Work Co-ordination Group, the United Front Work Department, the Ministry of Public Safety, the Ministry of State Security, the People's Liberation Army, the Armed Police Force, the State Council Information Office or the State Council's Religious Affairs Bureau.

"Accepting the so-called 'autonomy' of the Dalai Lama would shake the foundations of the party-state, so there can be no yielding on this point. Therefore, 'talks' are for the Communist side just a perfunctory exercise and only done for show, and so of course there can be no concrete results from them."

The other logic for demonizing the Dalai Lama in the Chinese leadership psyche is that "there can be no equal negotiating partners. There can only be enemies locked in a life and death struggle."

The Party's fear of loss of its predominant role and the superiority complex of the present leadership makes it impossible for Beijing to engage in serious talks with Dharamsala. There is no doubt in Zhang Boshu's mind, that the origin of the present problem, not only in Tibet, but in China in general, is the dictatorship of the Communist Party. For him: "Things that are past cannot be called back. But we should remember the lessons of history, and look at the issues of today and tomorrow with a scientific attitude. This is the responsibility of the present generation." Ironically, President Hu Jintao always speaks of 'scientific' approach. But in his case, it is probably more a slogan.

ANOTHER DISSENTING VOICE

Mention of Wang Lixiong and his essay *Roadmap of Tibetan Independence* has been briefly made earlier. He also believes that the reactions of the Party are counterproductive: "I had not taken the possibility of Tibetan independence into serious consideration before the incident in Tibet in 2008. It serves as the watershed that compels me to realize that Tibetan independence, for a long time being a fantasy, has turned into an emerging issue and reached the eyesight of the public. This change is brought by none other than the 'anti-secession' institutions in China's bureaucratic system." His main argument is that there are a considerable number of institutions which deal with Tibet in today's Chinese power structure.

These institutions²³ feed thousands of bureaucrats, mainly of Han origin, responsible according to Wang, for the current mess: "Each of these institutions has a division that deals with Tibet, and fosters a large number of bureaucrats who have based their entire career on such issues." The institutions have one policy in common: 'anti-secession'. This shapes their

role in China's bureaucratic system. An interesting point made by Wang is that, unlike during the First and Second Generation leadership, where powerful leaders such as Mao or Deng could give a direction to the Party and their visions and orders had to be immediately implemented by the lower-rank bureaucracy, the present generation does not have the power to impose their views and even less to get their orders executed. He argues that after the 'March Incident' [unrest in Tibet] the second-rank leadership has created a schism between China and Tibet, between the Hans and the Tibetans which can only result in a more articulate demand for 'independence' by the Tibetans. In a way, the excess of the 'anti-splittism' bureaucracy, their obsession with secession, have strengthened the pro-*Rangzen* (pro-independence) movement inside Tibet. The same bureaucracy's attack on the foreign media has also fueled pro-Tibet sentiments abroad. The absence of a charismatic leader as well as the fact that the regime depends more and more on the PLA (or at least the PAP) to survive is an ominous sign for China.

DISSIDENCE IN CHINA

It is interesting to note that both Zhang Boshu and Wang Lixiong are not dissidents, in the historic sense of the term.²⁴ They never personally attack top leaders and they are careful to put the blame on lower rank officials or bureaucrats. This explains why even their blogs or publications are only occasionally banned in China and that many people are aware of their writings. This was not the case of the famous dissident Wei Jingsheng who in 1992 dared to write directly to the paramount leader, Deng Xiaoping. Already in November 1981, Wei had said: "*it became very clear that I was the chicken killed as a warning to the monkeys*". He was referring to his essay²⁵ on *The Fifth Modernization* written on the Democracy Wall for which he was jailed. Deng had spoken of the China's *Four Modernizations*, Wei had added 'democracy'.

Wei believed that for Deng Xiaoping the dissidents did not matter much; the old leader's main worry was the Party officials and he wanted to make sure that nobody could be bitten by the democracy virus. In the process, a few chickens like Wei were sacrificed.

Deng made some examples 'to warn the monkeys'. He frankly told Deng Xiaoping: "The Tibet issue is a difficult one because of its uniqueness and the vagueness of its sovereignty. As a matter of fact, the existing international law is no longer applicable and many parts of it are mutually contradictory so that it cannot be [used to judge] more complicated matters of today's world. Over-emphasis of this out-dated and non-binding international law will not in any way help to find the solution to the problem we face today. For instance, in reality, Canada and Australia enjoy total independence and sovereignty. It will be ridiculous if we defined them as Britain's colonies or even Britain's territory by arguing that the head of state of these two countries is the Queen of the United Kingdom and top government officials must be approved by the Queen. In solving problems, people should face reality and should not try to find 'evidence and facts' only from history book. ...The Tibet issue is more special and more complicated than the above-mentioned cases."

The Chinese dissident mentioned three pressing tasks: "**First**, mutual hatred and discrimination between the Han people and the Tibetans must be rooted out, especially erroneous ideas in the minds of Han people about the Tibetans." As we have seen through the essays of Wang Lixiong and Zhang Boshu, the situation has further deteriorated during the last two decades. Then, Wei says: "**Secondly**, the government should speed up the development of the market economy in Tibet and establish closer economic relations between the heartland areas and the Tibetan market." The 1990's have seen a tremendous development of the areas populated by Tibetans, the problem is that the local people have not benefited from the golden era. The migrants, mostly of Han origin, have been the beneficiaries of the 'Go West' and other campaigns started under President Jiang Zemin.

The **third** point of Wei Jingsheng was "The Chinese Government should abolish its policy of detaining Tibetan religious leaders as hostages. Both religious and non-religious Tibetans have a strong aversion to this policy; and this is a clear violation of human rights." The remarks of Wang Lixiong, particularly

²⁴ About the fact that intellectuals dare today to write openly, Prof Samdhong Rinpoche, the Tibetan Prime Minister told us in an interview: "The faith and the courage of people had been destroyed [during the Cultural Revolution]. [There are] signs that the lost courage and objectiveness is coming back, the courage to look for the truth. This tendency is not returning in a small way, not with few exceptional people only; it is coming on a very large scale. We have noticed more than 500 articles in a year. There must be much more, because we do not have access to all local or smaller publications. It means that there is a quick awakening [in China]. Although the international community (meaning the governments, I am not speaking of the civil society) are not able to speak the truth, the ordinary people (in this case the Chinese) are speaking."

²⁵ *The Fifth Modernization* was a signed wall poster written by Wei Jingsheng on December 5, 1978 on the Democracy Wall in Beijing. It was the first poster that openly advocated further individual liberties. For Wei, 'freedom' was the only "modernization" that really mattered.

on the police brutality against monks and the demonization of the Dalai Lama, show that no improvement can be expected in the near future from a regime whose only legitimacy is brutal force. The dissenting voices are indeed a factor which should not be neglected while analyzing the relations between Tibet and China: traditionally in China, all revolutions have started when thinkers began looking at insuperable problems from a different angle. The future will perhaps demonstrate if they can breach the gap between the Communist government in Beijing and the exiled Administration in Dharamsala.

IS CHINA A REPUBLIC?

Sixty years after its foundation, the 'Republic' (from the latin *res publica* or 'public matter') is not for the 'public', but for a Party. China is still not a 'republic'. Even the Army is the Party's Army and not the State's (or Republic's) as everywhere else in the world. This is the tragedy of modern China. It is apparent at all levels of the State, even the highest, such as the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the CCP.

Probably the most serious failure of the Middle Kingdom has been that it has been unable to introduce a modern system of governance. Though the word 'people's' is recurrent in all State organs, the nation is run by a single Party since 1949. Ordinary people have no say in State affairs.

National People's Congress Chairman Wu Bangguo recently declared that China will 'never go down the devious path' of 'Western institutions'. But whether Beijing agrees or not, human rights, basic personal laws or universal suffrage are today values accepted by all non-rogué nations.

Supreme opacity adds to the undependability of the system; glasnost (transparency) has never been a Chinese forte.

Interestingly, some of the opacity was lifted by Zhao Ziyang, the former General Secretary of the CCP. In his secretly recorded memoirs, he explained that he once wrote to Deng Xiaoping, the paramount leader about 'perfecting the system of the central leadership' and 'how to really establish democratic centralism within the Central Committee, especially within the

Politburo and its Standing Committee'; in other words, to have a tested and accepted system to succession.

Zhao told Deng: "Maintaining the stability of the fundamental laws of the nation is certainly one aspect; however ... I believe that fundamentally and most importantly, we must tackle the system of the Party leadership." He proposed "to establish a much-needed system of leadership for our Party and then to personally inspect and seek compliance so as to make it a custom and culture that will not shift according to the changing of individuals, so it will pass on through the generations." We know what happened to Zhao during the Tiananmen events in 1989. He was unceremoniously removed from his post as Secretary General of the CCP and kept under house surveillance for the rest of his life; his crime was to have listened to the students' grievances on the Square.

Today, China has become a power to reckon with. Napoleon Bonaparte, the French Emperor is supposed to have pronounced the famous sentence: "When China awakes, the world will tremble." But certain aspects of the Middle Kingdom's rise to a superpower are indeed scary. We see it everyday in the world press. It was been exacerbated by Beijing's new nationalism fueled by the economic rise of China and the success of the Beijing Olympics Games. Though Beijing would like to 'teach lessons' to India, it is perhaps time for the 'people's republic' to look inside and integrate its own people into a proper system of governance.

Thirty years after the introduction of the 'open economic policy' by Deng Xiaoping, the leadership in Beijing should introduce political reforms which will allow, not only 'nationalities' and 'minorities' to play their role, but also each and every Chinese citizen. This would certainly bring a great deal of stability to the Middle Kingdom, thereby reducing tensions in the neighbourhood. Beijing should study the case of Arunachal Pradesh where 72% of the voters exercised their franchise during the last Assembly elections. The day populations on the other side of the McMahon Line are able to enjoy the same basic rights, will be an important day to celebrate for the People's Republic of China.