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Human Rights and Cultural Values: The Political Philosophies of the Dalai Lama and the People's Republic of China

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The preamble to the United Nations' "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" claims that this document's provisions constitute "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations," and since its ratification in 1948, it has in fact served as a general standard by which the conduct of nations is judged in international forums. Recently, however, some states have publicly questioned the universality of the rights outlined in the Universal Declaration, claiming that its provisions are based on Western concepts of government and human nature, that it is a tool of Western cultural hegemony imposed on non-Western countries, and that it ignores the distinctive cultural values of non-Western peoples.

Although the Universal Declaration is held by its proponents to be a neutral document that applies to all human beings and takes no position regarding what type of government or social order societies should adopt, representatives of third-world countries have criticized the Declaration on the grounds that its framers were all from Western countries, and no Africans or Asians, for example, participated in the process. They further claim that the vision of rights contained in the document is slanted toward the West and that it is biased in favor of Western individualistic conceptions of human rights while ignoring the values of communalism and social harmony cherished in many non-Western societies.

The most prominent critic of this document in recent years has been the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC), which is frequently castigated by international organizations and in the press for violations of human rights. China is often cited as one of the leading abusers of human rights along with such nations as Iran and Iraq, and agencies such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International that monitor human rights practices regularly release reports indicating that China is one of the worst transgressors of human rights standards. For many years the Chinese government insisted that it was in full compliance with these standards and that attacks on its human rights record were politically motivated slander perpetrated by its enemies. However, in the face of overwhelming documentary evidence contradicting these assertions, China was regularly denounced by international organizations such as the United Nations for its treatment of its own citizens and of conquered minority populations in Tibet, Mongolia, and Manchuria.

In recent years, the Chinese authorities have altered their official position significantly. They now proclaim that the principles outlined in the Universal Declaration and similar documents are inapplicable in an Asian context and that the basic duty of a government is to provide economic security for its people and to ensure that their basic needs are met. The government's primary goals should be harmony, economic opportunity, and protection from foreign aggression. Moreover, according to a recent statement by Wu Jianmin, China and Western countries "have different conceptions of human rights," and Asians are concerned not with "the privileges of the few, but with the rights of the many." Interestingly, this contention has had some effect on Western leaders, and when asked for his position on Chinese human rights practices, President Clinton declared that China and other Asian countries are entitled to their own definition of human rights, and he added that "we see in the culture of China, and in many other Asian societies, a desire to preserve order in the interests of the group, often at the expense of the individual."

The major human rights organizations have rejected this position as being merely a self-serving attempt to obfuscate China's abysmal human
rights record, but their statements are dismissed by Chinese authorities as interference in China's internal affairs that serves the interests of Western imperialists. In a recent statement in response to an Asia Watch report on China's human rights record in 1993, for example, a Chinese official stated that "Asia Watch is highly prejudiced against China and therefore cannot truly understand the human rights situation in China. . . . It is with ulterior motives and irresponsible for Asia Watch to . . . publish its human rights report, which makes accusations against China." 5

While the Chinese position has been supported by some nations (generally countries whose human rights records are also under attack), it has been rejected by other Asian governments and organizations, which contend that the rights outlined in the Universal Declaration are in fact universal and apply to all peoples at all times and in all cultures. One of the most prominent Asian voices favoring this position is the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan leader who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his efforts in pursuit of global peace.

This article examines the philosophical differences between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama, focusing on the relation between differing cultural values and the modern movement toward common and universally binding human rights standards. As this article shows, the positions of all parties in the dispute reflect cultural, religious, and political assumptions that derive from differing conceptions of human nature and proper government. A central question is whether the Chinese claims to a special status can be supported in light of Chinese cultural norms. Are human rights morally and legally binding for all people and governments, or are they instead arbitrary or culturally determined? Can nations that violate these principles legitimately be judged by standards that they reject, or are human rights issues best left to individual governments? In examining these questions, this article selectively highlights aspects of the backgrounds of some important players in the current dispute.

What Are Human Rights?

Although the term human rights is common in international forums, there is little consensus on what it actually means. As used in international organizations and documents, it refers to claims that every individual has (or should have) on his or her society, claims that apply to all people and governments regardless of race, gender, religion, economic status, ideology, or occupation. They are held to accrue to all people by virtue of their humanity, and as such are inalienable. They cannot legitimately be abrogated, nor can they be removed. Even if they are suspended by individual governments or leaders, they remain universal and binding, no matter how long they are denied. 6

Because they are rights, individuals do not possess them due to the charity of their governments, and they need not be earned (although some, such as freedom of movement, may be suspended as a result of a serious crime). Rather, they are basic entitlements common to all human beings, and they are not to be suspended arbitrarily or even as a means to achieving some societal goals. Human rights represent claims that the individual has upon society and the government, and it is the duty of governments to ensure that these are not violated by individuals or by organs of government. These rights both limit what the government may legitimately do to the individual and outline what society is obligated to do for the individual. When described in international human rights documents such as the Universal Declaration, they are not vague or abstract principles, but rather specific precepts for respecting human dignity, individual autonomy, and application of laws based on a common sense of justice.

Commonly accepted rights include religious freedom and general freedom of belief; freedom of assembly; freedom from cruel and unusual punishment; equality of opportunity; and freedom from discrimination based on race, gender, or economic status. Human rights include prohibitions preventing governments from unreasonable intrusion in the private lives of their citizens, as well as guarantees of the right to retain legally obtained property, the right to due process, and equal protection under the law. International rights covenants also assume a basic right of peoples to determine their own governments and to have a voice in electing their leaders.

It should also be noted, however, that these rights are not absolute. The Universal Declaration, for example, states that "in the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society." 7 Thus, the rights outlined in the Universal Declaration may be abrogated or limited in specific situations subject to the rule of law. The right to life guaranteed in the Universal Declaration does not prevent governments from punishing some particularly heinous crimes by capital punishment, nor does freedom of movement prevent the imprisonment of criminals. Freedom of speech is subject to limitations dictated by national security, commonly accepted standards of morality, public health concerns, or the need to maintain public order. Rights may be limited in times of national emergency, but they cannot legitimately be eliminated. They are morally binding, and those states that choose to limit or suspend them are subject to international scrutiny, and their rights practices may be judged by impartial international bodies. Some rights, however, are considered inviolable even in cases of national emergency, such as the right to freedom from torture, freedom from racial or gender discrimination, and freedom of conscience.

These ideas are commonly accepted in Western-style democratic countries, and so it is not surprising to find that the development of human rights standards has been profoundly influenced by Western ideas and governments. The history of the human rights movement reflects this Western heritage. In modern times, some of the more influential human rights documents include the American Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, the Universal Declaration, the Helsinki Resolutions, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, all of which were wholly or primarily authored by Western writers, and all of which are strongly influenced by Western thinking and values. In addition, human rights thought in the West is commonly traced back to the political philosophies of Aristotle and Cicero, and more recently to seventeenth-century theorists such as Sir Edward Coke, Thomas Hooker, John Milton, and especially John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau.
Early American rights documents were influenced by ideas popularized by thinkers of the Continental Enlightenment, who believed that there are universal standards and values that are discernible by rational beings and that these are inherent to the human condition. Such ideas came to be generally referred to as "natural law" and were central to the philosophy of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. The Declaration of Independence, for example, claims that people are endowed with inalienable rights "to which the laws of nature and nature's God entitle them." It further declares that such rights as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are "self-evident": that is, that they are universal and valid for all times and all peoples.

Locke and Rousseau, in common with the framers of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, conceived of society as a community that people join voluntarily, by a social contract, and together the members of a society constitute "the people," who possess certain inalienable rights, including the right to choose representatives and the form of government that can best serve their needs. They determine the extent of the authority of their representatives, and all authority not expressly granted to them remains with "the people." These ideas reflect a particular conception of a good society, which is a liberal, free, and democratic society governed by rule of law and administered by a government whose influence on the lives of the people is restricted by constitutional guarantees of freedom.

Similar ideas underlie the U.S. Constitution, which contains a catalogue of rights that are also declared to be universally binding and that the document's authors believed derived from the Creator of the natural order. They are part of our nature as human beings. Individuals are viewed as autonomous and private, which reflects both American Protestant understandings of human nature and the American frontier experience, in which self-sufficiency and independence were valued. The framers of the Constitution wanted to design a state founded on their commonly held Christian principles, combined with an emphasis on the rule of law, respect for individual liberties, and minimal governmental intrusion in the lives of the people. As Justice William O. Douglas explains,

The natural rights have a broad base in morality and religion to protect man, his individuality, and his conscience against direct and indirect interference by government?. The penumbra of the Bill of Rights reflects human rights which, though not explicit, are implied from the very nature of man as a child of God. These human rights were the product both of political thinking and of moral and religious influences. Man, as a citizen, had known oppressive laws from time out of mind and was in revolt. Man, as a child of God, insisted he was accountable not to the state but to his own conscience and to his God. Man's moral and spiritual appetite, as well as his political ideals, demanded that he have freedom. Liberty was to be the way of life - inalienable, and safe from intrusion of government.

This passage outlines a number of ideas that are typical of Western rights thinking, beginning with the concept of natural law as a creation of God. This God is clearly the creator and law giver of the Judaean-Christian tradition, an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent being whose mandates are universally binding. Such a concept has no parallel in either classical Chinese thought or Tibetan Buddhism. The Confucian tradition, it should be noted, asserted the existence of Heaven (Tien), which oversees human affairs and confers a mandate to rule on the Emperor, but Heaven is neither omniscient nor omnipotent and is more concerned with promoting harmony and stability than with enforcing universal rules. Moreover, Heaven is more concerned with the personal integrity of rulers than with specific laws. Rulers are judged on the basis of their conduct and are expected to embody the Confucian ideals of human-heartedness (ren) and righteousness (li) to a high degree, but their actual practice of these ideas may take a wide variety of forms. Moreover, it is far more important that rulers have good hearts than that they strictly adhere to abstract norms, since the goodness of rulers positively affects their subjects, who are inspired to follow the examples of upright rulers.

The concept of God is also foreign to the contemporary leadership of China, which is officially Marxist and atheistic. Tibetan Buddhism similarly rejects the Western concept of God, following the Buddha's assertion that the existence or nonexistence of a creator God is irrelevant to the present situation and that speculation on such matters tends to distract people from truly important concerns, such as the nature and alleviation of human suffering.

Another distinctively Western assumption found in the Bill of Rights and in contemporary rights documents such as the Universal Declaration is the belief that people need to be protected from their governments. The Bill of Rights is designed to limit the power of the state to interfere in people's lives, an idea reflected in Article 30 of the Universal Declaration, which declares that "nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein."

Underlying this provision is a belief that government must be restrained from tendencies toward despotism and that unless restraints are imposed on their powers rulers will tend to engage in activities that interfere with the liberties of their people. As the following sections show, these suspicions were not a part of political thought in classical China and Tibet, which tended to focus on the importance of good will and cultivation of morality by rulers rather than on the necessity of limiting the power of rulers by law.

**Human Rights in Classical China**

Contrary to the assertions of some Western commentators, there is ample evidence that modern human rights concepts are compatible with certain traditional Chinese ethical tenets. For example, in traditional Chinese cosmology, although the power of the emperor was theoretically absolute, he was also subject to the dictates of Heaven, and its mandate was conditional upon his adherence to certain moral precepts. The most important of these was ren, human-heartedness, which should automatically constrain his actions. His chief concern should be the happiness of the people, and his actions should reflect a profoundly moral nature that was evident in his personal rectitude and unwavering moral compass. Such a ruler would put his people first and would not overstep the legitimate bounds of his authority. If he did, the mandate of
Heaven would be withdrawn and, according to Mencius and other Confucian thinkers, the people could legitimately remove him from power. If the people were unwilling or unable to accomplish this, Heaven itself would ensure his downfall.11

From the time that Confucianism became the dominant ideology in China in the second century B.C., its moral code was accepted as a standard for both rulers and subjects. Reinforced by tradition and social pressure, it constituted a common standard for moral activity. Long before the concept of the need for limitations on the power of rulers became generally accepted in the West, Confucian thought asserted that the power of the ruler was limited by universal standards of conduct and that there would be automatic punishment for anyone who transgressed these standards.

It should also be noted that in traditional China the actual power of the government was limited by its comparatively small size and by the fact that the central government's influence became progressively weaker as one moved from the central provinces; in the areas near the capital its ability to influence people's lives was greater than in outlying areas. In theory, the emperor was all-powerful, but in practice his power was divided by geographical obstacles, the relatively small size of the government in comparison to the large areas it claimed, and the pervasive influence of Confucian ideology, which was believed to supersede the authority of any particular ruler.

Although some Confucian principles are clearly concordant with contemporary ideas of human rights, significant differences exist between traditional Chinese society and the modern democratic states that have been at the forefront of the human rights movement. For example, in traditional China there was no concept of individual human rights, and membership in the society was not voluntary. The individual was not limited by geographical obstacles, the relatively small size of the government in comparison to the large areas it claimed, and the pervasive influence of Confucian ideology, which was believed to supersede the authority of any particular ruler.

In classical China the ideal was order and harmony rather than equality and individual liberty. Society depended on selfless cooperation and adherence to duty rather than individual independence and freedom of conscience. The individual was conceived as part of a group whose success required submission to group ideals and individual cultivation of ethical behaviors that would contribute to the good of the collective. Both rights and duties were not absolute, but were seen as negotiable and subject to the current needs of society. Maintaining the harmony of the hierarchical order was more important than promoting individual liberty, and people were expected to forgo their own selfish desires for the betterment of society.

Concepts of justice and jurisprudence were also variable, and legal norms and practices were adapted to changing circumstances in order to promote social harmony. In theory at least, the prevailing judicial philosophy was dictated by the emperor and carried out by the governmental bureaucracy. The primary function of the legal system was to maintain the social order of those who disturbed social harmony or who threatened the hierarchical order. Private disputes were commonly settled by mediation or local custom, and so ordinary Chinese citizens did not look to the legal system for redress of grievances against the state or for purposes other than promoting the order of the country.14

Human Rights in the People's Republic of China

When the Communist party came to power in 1949, it repudiated much of traditional Confucian ideology, most significantly the aspects of the Confucian system that placed ethical restraints on the power of government. The Marxist-Leninist system that was adopted conceived of society as being composed of mutually antagonistic classes. Class struggle was basic to Marxist ideology, and in this conception some had a superior claim to the protection and resources of the state. The state and its legal system were designed to suppress the aristocracy and land-holding classes while assuring the ascendency of the proletariat. Moreover, the party was envisioned as an instrument of the wishes of the proletariat, and it was said to be ruled by people whose understanding of the principles of class struggle made them uniquely fit to lead. In this system it would be absurd to call for leadership of the masses, including peasants and uneducated workers, because they have little or no understanding of the principles of socialism and thus are incapable of making informed decisions. The revolutionary class, because of its understanding of history and its grounding in Marxist-Leninist ideology, is able to make decisions that benefit society in the long term, and it represents the true interests of the people. Thus, the 1982 Chinese Constitution declares that all power belongs to the people, and that the people exercise power through the National People's Congress and the local people's congresses. These bodies represent the true will of the people (Article 2). The constitution also outlines the rights and duties of the people, the most important being the right to live in a socialist society and duties related to its support and furtherance of its goals. The state owns all land and is responsible for planning the economy, and no organization or individual may disrupt its plans (Article 15).

Chapter 2 of the constitution contains a list of rights, including equality before the law; the right to vote; freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, and demonstration; freedom of religious belief and practice; and freedom from unlawful detention or torture. As several commentators have pointed out, however, the constitution is not a contract between the people and the state that outlines the conditions under which they agree to be governed, but rather is a manifesto by the leaders to the people outlining both the current state of the society and its aspirations for the future, and so

The constitution appears not to prescribe the rights that government must observe, but rather sets forth the rights which the government claims to be providing and promises to provide?. Political organs interpret what the constitution means and can amend it formally when desired. No
There are no guarantees that any of the specific rights outlined in the constitutions will be observed in fact, and recent reports from human rights monitoring organizations indicate that the stipulations regarding freedom of religion, for example, are virtually meaningless, as are prohibitions against cruel and unusual punishment. Since the state grants rights to citizens, it is free to rescind them in accordance with changing policies and goals. The state has full power to limit or abrogate any of the rights described in its constitution, provided that it does so in accordance with law. This is not, however, a real restriction, since the state also controls the legal apparatus.

Chinese society under Marxism-Leninism is said to be ruled by a "dictatorship of the proletariat," which is clearly incompatible with Western concepts of democracy and protection of the individual's rights under the law. It also breaks with Chinese tradition, since class struggle replaces the earlier emphasis on harmony, while "historical necessity" and the laws of "historical development" govern human relations and the legal system. The necessary transformation of society is spearheaded by professional revolutionaries, the "vanguard of the proletariat," whose will corresponds with the aspirations and interests of the revolutionary class. Class struggle and class differences require the suppression of the old ruling classes and justify violations of human rights for the purpose of promoting socialist revolution.

In socialist societies, the individual is not the foundation of society, although the individual benefits from membership in the society. The purpose of the society is to promote the ideals of socialism through central control of the principal means of production, as well as communication and transportation. In the conceptions of Marx, Lenin, and Mao, there was no place for notions of individual rights. They viewed such ideas as products of bourgeois Western capitalist society and contended that in such societies "individual rights" were illusions, since workers were inevitably exploited and alienated by the economic system and the conditions of their employment; only socialist societies are truly capable of implementing meaningful human rights, but even in such countries rights enshrined in constitutions may not be enjoyed in fact, but may be mentioned in constitutions as desirable outcomes that the state would like to provide in the future. As Politburo member Peng Zhen declared in his report on the draft version of the 1982 constitution,

In the history of the world there have never been any absolute rights and freedoms not subject to any limitations. We are a socialist country, in which the interests of the state and society are basically identical to the interests of the individual. Only when the democratic rights and basic interests of the vast masses of the people are guaranteed and developed will it be possible for the freedoms and rights of individual citizens to be completely guaranteed and fully realized.

Both Marx and Lenin believed that promotion of rights for the proletariat constituted an important step on the road to socialism, but in building socialism individualism is an obstacle that blocks the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Even the idea that individuals have legitimate claims upon the society is contrary to the need to foster a sense of community in socialist societies. Only in such societies are human rights truly observed, because only socialism promotes productive work for all, and the workers equally enjoy the benefits of living in a socialist community. In the future, when the state has disappeared, the very concept of human rights will be archaic, since all members of society will live together in a free and mutually supportive collective.

According to the new rulers of China, Confucian humanism had to be rejected because it was "feudalistic," and Western concepts of human rights and democracy were said to reflect the inequalities of capitalist society and to be products of outdated, "bourgeois," and "imperialistic" thinking. Instead of human rights, conceived in terms of claims of the individual upon society, Chinese communism aims at transformation of society as a whole through class struggle. To achieve this end, the interests of the state should be paramount, and individuals should subvert their interests to those of the state and submit to the guidance of the party, which is the sole legitimate arbiter of policy. This tendency reached its apogee with Mao, who regarded law as an instrument for promoting party policy, and who believed that the party should speak with a single voice, one that reflected his programs for the transformation and revolutionization of Chinese society. He regarded any form of judicial review as an unwarranted restraint on party power, and this idea has also dominated legal thinking during the tenure of Deng Xiaoping, who has abandoned Mao's program of organizing mass "campaigns" to revolutionize society but has retained control over the legal system, which is still an instrument for punishing dissident elements and for promoting party policies.

During the 1990s, the legal system has increasingly been characterized by extreme use of force to control a restive population. Human rights groups estimate that as many as six million prisoners are in the laogai ("reeducation through labor") system, and according to Amnesty International torture is "endemic" today in Chinese prisons. Dissidents, particularly minorities, are punished harshly, and in Tibet, for example, calls for independence commonly lead to sentences of between eight and twenty years. Tibetans who are detained by Chinese police or incarcerated are routinely subjected to torture, and human rights groups report that religious figures and women are singled out for especially brutal treatment.

In the face of mounting criticism from international human rights monitoring organizations and other governments, China at first asserted that its human rights record is unimpeachable and fully in accord with international norms. As recently as 1990, the Chinese representative to the United Nations told the U.N. Committee Against Torture that as a member of the U.N. China is bound by its covenants, even those that it has not officially signed.

When China acceded to any convention, it became binding as soon as it entered into force. China then fulfilled all its obligations, and it was not necessary to draft special laws to ensure conformity. If an international instrument was inconsistent with domestic law, the latter was brought into line with the former. Where subtle differences remained, international instruments took precedence over domestic law.
Despite this claim, however, actual adherence to international rights conventions has been sporadic in China, and although Chinese authorities often pay lip service to the provisions in the Universal Declaration and similar documents, in practice they see them as primarily inspirational ideals that "must in practice be subject to national historical, social, economic, and cultural conditions." 24

The leadership of China is particularly sensitive to criticisms of its rights record, and it rejects the legitimacy of other governments or international organizations who attempt to make it an issue. When, for instance, President Jimmy Carter proclaimed in December 1978 that concern for human rights was "the soul" of U.S. foreign policy, Chinese leaders characterized his professed interest as a "hypocritical farce." Attempts by Western governments to pressure China to respect international standards of human rights have been denounced as unwarranted interference in China's "internal affairs" and as thinly disguised efforts to impose Western cultural hegemony on an Asian nation.

Recently, however, China's human rights record has been forcefully criticized by other Asian countries and by religious and political leaders around the world. A recent conference held in New Delhi from March 18 to 20, 1994, discussed China's occupation of Tibet. The All-Party Parliamentary Forum on Tibet reiterated that Tibet had been independent prior to the invasion 25 and that China is engaged in widespread human rights violations that amount to a program of genocide, and it referred to United Nations GA Resolution #1723 (XVI) of 1961, which condemned such practices and called for withdrawal of Chinese forces from occupied Tibet. This conference was embarrassing to China because it was held in an Asian capital of an officially nonaligned country, and the signatories included a cross-section of Asian and third-world countries, all of whom agreed that international human rights monitoring organizations were correct in confirming "the continued abuse of Tibetan human rights and the denial of fundamental freedoms by the Chinese authorities." 26 The Japanese representative, Takashi Yonezawa, declared, "We are very concerned that Tibet is in a situation that is against the will of the Tibetans. This meeting is also very important for the peace and stability in Asia as well as the world.

Such statements were particularly galling to the Chinese government, which aspires to leadership in Asia and the third world. Moreover, it indicated the hollowness of its assertions that its human rights record should be judged by the standards of Asian societies and not those of the West. In this forum, a number of Asian leaders indicated that China's actions in Tibet violate the standards of all civilized nations and highlighted the falseness of official Chinese claims that Tibetans today enjoy a higher standard of living and greater freedom than in the past. China's displeasure with the forum is indicated by the virulence of the government's official response:

This resolution ...distorts the real situation in Tibet and violates the principle of non-interference in each other's internal affairs. Early this year, a small number of Indian politicians initiated in India the so-called "All-Party Parliamentary Forum for Tibet" and launched against China a campaign of defamation under the pretext of so-called "human rights," and population and environment problems in Tibet. ... We are indignant and sternly condemn these clamors and activities aimed at splitting China and intervening in the internal affairs of China. 27

At the same time as it was being condemned for its genocide in Tibet, China proclaimed that it is in fact promoting economic development and that its efforts are enthusiastically supported by the Tibetan people. 28 On August 6, 1994, the People's Broadcasting Station in Lhasa stated,

Based on the need to expedite the nation's economic and social development and strengthen China's national coherence, the central authorities have formulated the policy that the whole nation should support Tibet and be Tibet's strong backing. The policy of mustering national efforts to support Tibet is a major policy for expediting Tibet's development. The support will be a long term one, and people of all nationalities in Tibet feel the warmth of the motherland and the superiority of the socialist system. 29

The official Chinese position on Tibet holds that traditional Tibetan government was autocratic and despotic and that the Tibetan "serfs" were freed from the tyranny of their leaders by their Chinese "big brothers," who brought with them a new era of peace and prosperity. Criticisms of China's policies in Tibet are politically motivated, and even Asian governments who denounce Chinese human rights practices in Tibet are really tools of Western imperialists. According to a recent editorial carried in Xizang Ribao,

The root causes of the problem are as follows: The Western hostile forces do not want to see a powerful and prosperous China and have been trying in all ways to contain and sabotage China's development, striving to create a split within our country. The Tibet issue is one of the cards they use to sabotage our development. The separatist elements in and outside this region are precisely a force used by Western hostile forces to sabotage the great cause of development. 30

In recent years, one of the most prominent critics of China's policies in Tibet has been the Dalai Lama, characterized by Chinese authorities as a "splitist" intent on separating Tibet from the "motherland" of China. He is regularly and forcefully denounced by Chinese authorities as a despotic ruler who presided over the "cruelst serfdom" in the history of the world, a monster who delighted in torture and exploitation of the Tibetan people. Such views are taught in Tibetan schools and regularly proclaimed on official radio and television programs. Remarkably, however, after almost four decades of vigorous propaganda, by all accounts the loyalty of most Tibetans to the Dalai Lama and the system he represents remains strong, and Chinese authorities often express surprise that they are still widely resented by the Tibetan people despite bringing modern industry, hospitals, roads, and schools to the region. 31

Democracy, Human Rights, and Changing Political Realities in Tibet

Prior to the Chinese invasion in 1951, most of the power in Tibet lay in the hands of Buddhist teachers called lamas (bla ma). Some were born into the position as tülkus (sprul sku, "emanation bodies"), believed to be physical manifestations of buddhas or reincarnations of eminent teachers. Others distinguished themselves through their scholarship or meditative attainments. The spiritual and temporal leader of Tibet was the Dalai Lama, a tülku who according to tradition was an incarnation of the buddha Avalokiteśvara, the embodiment of compassion. Many
According to Tibetan tradition, Avalokiteśvara had taken a special interest in Tibet and personally oversaw the dissemination of Buddhism in the country. Through his human incarnations such as the Dalai Lama, he provided benevolent guidance superior to any human leadership. As a buddha, he was fully omniscient and compassionate, completely above partisanship and pettiness of any kind, and impartial in his concern for the people of the country. These attributes were also held to characterize the thousands of other tülkus in Tibet and neighboring regions, whose wisdom was thought to surpass that of ordinary mortals. As Cassinelli and Ekvall note, great tülkus such as the Throne Holder (khirchen) of Sa skya were widely viewed as living beings reborn in Tibet to benefit others, and the populace looked to them for guidance in both religious and temporal matters: "They had the power to aid ordinary mortals in the long progress toward liberation; they were worshipped, their advice was sought, and offerings were presented to them." 32

From the time of the Religious Kings (chos rgyal), 33 most Tibetans saw religious practices and figures as being intimately connected with the governance of the country, and because of their exalted status the tülkus enjoyed widespread popular support and respect. The common people of Tibet assumed that these enlightened beings were better suited to making decisions than they were, and it was rare for ordinary Tibetans to openly question the decisions and policies of a great tülku like the Dalai Lama. 34

Thus, in theory the tülkus enjoyed great power, although in practice the power of the government was quite limited. The locus of power was Lhasa, the capital city, and in the central agricultural provinces of Dbu and Gtsang the government was in charge of political affairs. In the outlying provinces, however, its power was greatly diminished, and many of the remote provinces at most paid lip service to the hegemony of the central government. 35

By all accounts, the Tibetan government had little interest in controlling the lives of the Tibetan people, and its primary concern was propagating Buddhism. Tibet had no real army—only small, poorly trained and poorly armed local militias—and no effective police force. In addition, the government was a cumbersome bureaucracy composed of agencies with overlapping responsibilities and limited power. 36 All temporal authority theoretically rested in the hands of the Dalai Lama, but in practice his power was limited by the relative weakness of the central government and by a general unwillingness on the part of Tibet's rulers to exercise much control over the population. The restrictions on the power of the Throne Holder of Sa skya described by Cassinelli and Ekvall also pertain to the situation of the Dalai Lama and the central government:

The power of the Khri Chen was . . . subject to a number of severe limitations. He was limited by the primitive state of Tibetan technology and by the absence of sophisticated forms of human organization. A Khri Chen could not, for example, mobilize his people for a "great leap forward," nor could he maintain a constant check on their activities and attitudes. 37

The Dalai Lama was similarly limited in power, and his actual control over the people was also constricted by tradition and religious ideas. Because of the long-standing policy of general nonintervention in the lives of the populace, Tibetans would not accept a marked departure from previous practice. In addition, the religious duties of the Dalai Lama and other major tülkus were very time-consuming, and they were expected to spend long periods in meditation. The Dalai Lama was as much a religious as a political figure, and he was expected to adhere to long-established customs regarding the conduct and exercise of power by Dalai Lamas. As a tülku, his primary function was to aid sentient beings in attaining liberation and to give them advice on practical affairs. As the embodiment of compassion, any tendencies toward despotism would be viewed as being out of character, and Dalai Lamas were trained in proper conduct from a very young age. 38 He was expected to make decisions that benefited the people and that promoted harmony and social stability. It was generally assumed that a peaceful and stable society was most conducive to the practice of Buddhism, and so the powerful and conservative monastic institutions tended to effectively veto any attempts at radical change. 39 According the present Dalai Lama,

Tibetan civilization is very much a product of the socially transformative power of Buddhism. . . . After a few centuries, Tibetans had become so fond of the Buddha Dharma that they made great efforts to make it the center of their lives, even without the support of a royal dynasty. Finally, after one thousand years, Tibetans succeeded in expressing Buddhist ideals in the national government itself, established as the integration of the sacred and the secular by the Fifth Dalai Lama. . . . We believed that the Buddha's teaching was the indispensable key to achieving national as well as individual happiness. So our whole social system - our culture, arts and life style - was centered on people's spiritual development according to the Dharma. 40

The pervasiveness of Buddhist ideology in Tibet also served as an effective counteragent to arbitrary exercise of power. According to Tibetan Buddhism, worldly existence is unreal, and worldly power is a trap in which the unwary enmesh themselves. All of existence is viewed as cyclical, and even the most powerful and wealthy beings inevitably lose what they have gained and then must pay for their misdeeds in future lives. Moreover, Buddhist texts stress the meaninglessness of pursuing worldly goals, and Tibetan children grow up with tales of the folly of harming others to achieve one's own ends. Thus, although in theory the Dalai Lama had absolute authority, in fact his power was constrained by the geographical conditions in Tibet, by the small size and military weakness of the government, by the Dalai Lama's training, and by ideology.

Because the major powers in Tibet were Buddhist monks whose primary concern was the propagation of Buddhism, the people were by and large left alone if they did not interfere with this goal, although they were also expected to contribute to Buddhist monasteries and practitioners. In addition, many regions in Tibet enjoyed virtual autonomy, and as Geoffrey Samuel has observed, "the Dalai Lama's regime at Lhasa was only one, if in recent years the largest, of a variety of state formations within the Tibetan region." 41
This situation changed completely with the Chinese invasion. After annexing Tibet, China began a program of transforming it into a socialist province. As a result of its program of subduing the population, an estimated 1.2 million people were killed, either by Chinese troops or by enforced starvation. Millions more were forcibly put into communes, and the property of the aristocracy was taken away and administered by the central government. In an attempt to weaken the people's attachment to religion, Chinese troops and cadres destroyed thousands of monasteries and religious structures and publicly humiliated religious figures. In recent years, the government has continued to use torture and long prison sentences to subdue attempts to agitate for Tibetan independence and even calls to respect internationally recognized standards of human rights. The cornerstone of the current Chinese policy to subdue Tibet is a massive population transfer, which has reduced the Tibetan people to a minority in their own country. In addition, the government is systematically destroying old Tibetan buildings and neighborhoods and replacing them with Chinese settlers and large concrete structures.

In 1959, after Chinese troops captured Lhasa, the Dalai Lama fled into exile in India, where he set up a new government in the former British hill station of Dharamsala. The Tibetan government in exile was initially modeled on the central government of Lhasa, with the Dalai Lama as the head of state and a National Assembly (Kashag) whose role was primarily advisory. In recent years, however, the Tibetan exile government has undergone drastic changes. In 1962 the Dalai Lama declared that the old autocratic system had been an impediment to Tibet's development and contributed to its military weakness. He initiated the drafting of a new constitution, which was to be a blueprint for independent Tibet when and if the Tibetan people gain effective control over their internal affairs. This draft constitution stressed democratic principles and declared that in the future Tibet the people would democratically elect their leaders, that Tibet would become completely demilitarized and be designated as a "zone of peace," and that Tibet would renounce all forms of military aggression. As the Dalai Lama envisions the future of Tibet, Tibet will be a neutral, demilitarized sanctuary where weapons are forbidden and the people live in harmony with nature. I have called this a Zone of Ahimsa or non-violence. This is not merely a dream - it is precisely the way Tibetans tried to live for over a thousand years before our country was tragically invaded. In Tibet, wildlife was protected in accordance with Buddhist principles. We enacted decrees to protect the environment, but it was mainly protected by the beliefs which were instilled in us as children.

Although the new constitution enshrined democratic principles and contained provisions that accord with contemporary international rights standards, the Tibetan people have experienced conceptual difficulties in the practical implementation of the constitution. After centuries of rule by lamas believing to be manifestations of buddhas, the proposal to grant effective power to merely human representatives struck many Tibetans as a misguided idea, since ordinary beings could be expected to pursue petty goals, engage in political maneuvering for themselves and their associates, and sometimes to put their own welfare ahead of that of the people. Many Tibetans were especially reluctant to endorse a provision that stipulated that in independent Tibet the Dalai Lama would be simply a religious leader, would not be able to hold public office, and could be impeached by a two-thirds vote of the Kashag. Many protested this provision, which proposed to treat an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara as an ordinary mortal. Interestingly, the Dalai Lama himself insisted on this provision, recognizing that in a modern democracy no one should be above the law. The people's resistance to his initiative indicates how foreign democratic principles remain to many Tibetans.

To counteract this lack of understanding, Tibetan exile schools now require students to take classes on democratic theory and practice in the hope that the next generation of Tibetans will understand and embrace democracy. The Tibetan exile government also sponsors an annual holiday called Democracy Day, in which schoolchildren are released from classes to participate in a celebration of the democratic principles and respect for international human rights standards enshrined in the draft constitution.

Despite ongoing efforts to educate the populace, however, many Tibetans - particularly those who fled Tibet in the aftermath of the Chinese invasion - still long for the old system, but the Dalai Lama has categorically stated on a number of occasions that the move toward democracy is irrevocable. In a recent open letter to Deng Xiaoping, for example, he stated that since my youth, I was aware of the many faults of the existing system in Tibet and wanted to improve it. At that time I started the process of reform in Tibet. Soon after our flight to India we introduced democracy in our exile community, step by step. I repeatedly urged my people to follow this path. As a result, our exiled community now implements a system in full accordance with universal democratic principles. It is impossible for Tibet to ever revert to the old system of government. Whether my efforts for the Tibetan cause are as charged by the Chinese for my personal position and benefit or not is clear from my repeated statements that in a future Tibet, I will not assume any governmental responsibility or hold any political position. Furthermore, this is reflected clearly in the Charter which governs the Tibetan Administration in Exile and in the "Guidelines for Future Tibet's Polity and the Basic Features of Its Constitution."

Despite these efforts, actual implementation of democratic principles has proceeded slowly. Although the Kashag was elected democratically following the ratification of the draft constitution, its members still clung to pre-diaspora traditions and in practice deferred to the Dalai Lama on important decisions. After decades of unsuccessful attempts to encourage the Kashag to accept additional responsibilities and become a truly representative body, in May 1990 the Dalai Lama officially disbanded the old Kashag and opened its membership in new general elections. In his final autocratic decision, he told the members of the Kashag, regarding the Assembly of [Tibetan] People's Deputies, so far I had the ultimate authority of selecting its members. Although elected by the people, the final selections were done by me. This practice has to change now. From now on, the people's decision will be final. I feel that the Dalai Lama should have no role here. The future Assembly will be entrusted with the power of appointing the kalons. The present Assembly, which has come up through the old procedure, stands dissolved from today.
The present Kashag consists of 46 members, most of whom are elected by the Tibetan exile community in India, with the others representing Tibetans in Europe and North America. The Dalai Lama has spearheaded the movement toward adoption of democratic principles and practices, but he recognizes that for his people to fully embrace these ideas, they must be translated into language derived from their own culture. In public talks and in a number of essays, he has expressed a belief that respect for human rights and democracy go together and that it is possible to arrive at the same standards set forth in the Universal Declaration and similar documents by way of Buddhist thought and practice. He rejects the PRC claim that human rights and democracy are foreign to Asian culture and contends that the pan-Asian tradition of Buddhism provides ample support for the most important stipulations found in the Universal Declaration. In reference to the Chinese claims that Asians have no concept of human rights, he stated,

Respect for fundamental human rights is as important to the people of Africa and Asia as it is to those in Europe or the Americas. All human beings, whatever their cultural or historical background, suffer when they are intimidated, imprisoned or tortured. . . . We must, therefore, insist on a global consensus not only on the need to respect human rights worldwide, but also on the definition of these rights. Some governments have contended that the standards of human rights laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are those advocated by the West and cannot be applied to Asia and other parts of the Third World because of differences in culture and differences insocial and economic development. I do not share this view, and I am convinced that the majority of Asian people do not support this view either, for it is the inherent nature of all human beings to yearn for freedom, equality and dignity, and they have an equal right to achieve that. . . . The rich diversity of cultures and religions should help to strengthen the fundamental human rights in all communities. Underlying this diversity are fundamental human principles that bind us all as members of the same human family. Diversity and traditions can never justify violations of human rights. Thus discrimination of persons from a different race, of women, and of weaker sections of the society may be traditional in some regions, but if they are inconsistent with universally recognized human rights, these forms of behavior should change.  

In his public statements and writings on political philosophy, the Dalai Lama emphasizes the Buddhist idea of interdependence as a basis for a global ethic of caring and respect for human rights. According to Buddhist philosophy, all life is bound together through relations of mutual causality, and all actions have ripple effects that reach beyond the individuals who commit them. In addition, the Buddhist understanding of karma holds that every volitional action inevitably rebounds on the person who committed it, and so everyone experiences effects directly concordant with the initial action. For these reasons, it is prudent to treat others as one would want to be treated oneself and to avoid engaging in actions that bring suffering to others.

Hatred, anger, and greed simply produce uneasiness and always more dissatisfaction. Even nations need to control and minimize anger and hatred; it is the only way they can avoid suffering and bring their people happiness. . . . Goodness is finally the most practical, the most realistic solution.

According to the Dalai Lama, all human beings are linked by a common humanity, and the actions of any person or nation affect the entire human family. In addition, he contends that all people instinctively understand suffering and seek to avoid it for themselves. We all equally desire happiness and seek to avoid suffering, but when we do so at the expense of others our actions inevitably rebound on us. Moreover, if we take a global view, we will realize that everyone equally wishes to avoid suffering and to find happiness, and no one person or group has a greater claim to these than any other.

As far as the feeling of wanting happiness and not wanting suffering, the two sides are equal, absolutely the same. . . . However, no matter how important the selfishly motivated person is, he or she is only one single person. No matter how poor the others are, they are limitless, infinite. The unbiased person naturally can see that the many are more important than the one.

A rational person should conclude that we should all contribute to the common good, and in international politics this includes respect for human rights and the right to self-determination for all peoples.

Conclusion

The Dalai Lama claims that "ancient Buddhist philosophy recognizes the inherent interdependence of all life on the planet and teaches us that our actions resonate far beyond our immediate surroundings." His social philosophy draws on a variety of Buddhist sources to demonstrate how current human rights covenants accord with Buddhist ideals and practices. This is important for the present analysis, because Buddhism is one of the two most pervasive pan-Asian philosophies, along with Confucianism. As discussed here, many of the ideals of classical Confucianism and pre-Communist political practices were concordant with contemporary human rights thinking. There were, of course, despotic regimes throughout Chinese history, but the practices of these regimes violated Confucian norms and pre-Confucian ideals regarding the proper conduct of rulers. It is also true, as the PRC government claims, that classical Chinese thought tended to value communalism over individualism, but there is no reason to suppose that this emphasis necessarily leads to a diminished capacity to embrace the human rights principles outlined in the Universal Declaration.

If the Dalai Lama is correct in his assertions that Buddhism is also concordant with human rights thinking and that Buddhist notions of karma and interdependence inevitably lead to conclusions congruent with those found in the Universal Declaration and similar documents, this would indicate that although the history of human rights thought is strongly linked with Western thinkers and nations, it is also compatible with at least two important Asian traditions that have profoundly influenced Asian thought and society. This conclusion undermines the PRC contention that human rights are a Western creation that is inapplicable in an Asian context and that is rejected by Asian peoples.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that current Chinese practice and social theory are at odds with both the human rights movement and the current
global trend toward democracy. The PRC government keeps all real power in its hands, and elections are sham affairs in which unopposed party candidates win by overwhelming margins. Dissidents are regularly tortured, and minority populations such as the Tibetans are subjected to brutal punishment for even minor offenses as part of a campaign to suppress any movement toward self-determination. The PRC government's policies and practices are concordant with its Marxist ideology, which emphasizes social stability and condones abrogation of rights - even those enshrined in the constitutions - for the purpose of maintaining social order. The constitutions themselves are not inviolable, but change over time. They are subject to reinterpretation in accordance with current Party goals and policies.

These patterns are also common to other Marxist states and are clearly not attributable to Asian ideals and traditions. Marxism is an importation from Europe, and although the PRC government claims to be creating "socialism with Chinese characteristics," the governments it most closely resembles are other Marxist-Leninist states in Eastern Europe. The current PRC leadership has officially repudiated both Confucianism and Buddhism, claiming that they are remnants of a "feudal" past, but the current Marxist-Leninist state is a new phenomenon in Asia, whose ideology represents a major break with Asian tradition. It accords with neither Confucian nor Buddhist thought. In terms of the size of the government and the military and their pervasive control of the lives of the Chinese people - and in the extent and brutality of oppression they use to maintain their hold on power - the PRC closely resembles the totalitarian and authoritarian regimes of Eastern European communist states, but has little in common with Asian traditions or practices.

Notes


2. In February of 1993, Asia Watch released a 664-page report on violations of the rights of minority people in Tibet, entitled Detained in China and Tibet, which claimed that "political repression is increasing? and it extends to virtually every province in China and throughout the Tibetan plateau"; reported by Reuters, February 20, 1994. On May 13, 1994, Robin Moore, Hong Kong director of Asia Watch, stated that China has enacted provisions giving police greater powers to detain and restrict the activities of ethnic minorities, as well as democracy and labor groups; reported by UPI in the Washington Post, May 13, 1994. BACK TO TEXT


5. Reported by Reuters, February 22, 1994. BACK TO TEXT


7. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 29.2. BACK TO TEXT


10. See, for example, Aºguttara-nik?ya 113. BACK TO TEXT


13. Benjamin Schwartz, The World of Thought in Ancient China, pp. 76-77. BACK TO TEXT


18. An article in Red Flag summarized this idea in 1983: "The destiny of the motherland and the destiny of an individual are as inseparable as flesh and blood. One loses one's family if one's country is destroyed. If the motherland is not prosperous and developed, individuals cannot find outlets for their abilities"; see Red Flag, no. 4 (February 16, 1983).

19. Address to the Fifth Session of the Fifth National People's Congress, November 26, 1982; reported in Fazhi bao (December 10, 1982): 1.


22. Asia Watch, Merciless Repression, p. 3.


25. The parliamentarians cited the report of the International Commission of Jurists stating that Tibet had been a fully independent state prior to the Chinese invasion of 1951.

26. Reported in Tibetan Bulletin (March 1994). Countries represented included Costa Rica, the Republic of Korea, Argentina, Australia, the Republic of Botswana, Germany, Kenya, the Republic of Cyprus, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Malawi, the Netherlands, Namibia, United Arab Emirates, Switzerland, Great Britain, Sweden, U.S.A., Philippines, Singapore, and Brazil.


28. The official Chinese position is that "the old Tibetan government was corrupt and despotic and that Tibet has, since the 13th century, always been an inseparable part of China, and is today one of the five National Autonomous Regions in China. Only China and the Tibetans living on the Chinese land know best both the past and the present of Tibet. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, especially after the democratic reform which took place in 1959 in Tibet, the long standing serfdom, a system even darker than the middle Ages in Europe, was abolished. This was an action of great importance aimed at protecting human rights and at promoting social progress in Tibet. Since then, Tibet has entered a completely new period of development. The Tibetans fully enjoy democracy, freedom and human rights as stipulated in the State Constitution, the Law on National Regional Autonomy and other relevant laws." (Jiaozi, March 3, 1994)

This passage, however, contains a serious lapse of logic: if Tibet has been an inalienable part of China, it would be difficult to explain how Tibetans could have run their own affairs and created the sort of autonomous order described here. Moreover, the article goes on to paint a glowing picture of the present economic and political situation in Tibet, claiming that Tibetans today enjoy unlimited economic opportunities and freedom and that they eagerly embrace the policies of the Chinese leadership, which contradicts the fact that Tibetans by the thousands escape the country every year and that even Tibetan cadres often send their children to school in India so they may learn about their culture.

29. Xizang Ribao, August 6, 1994; reported by the British Broadcasting Company, August 11, 1994.


31. An example was the response of Tibetans to fact-finding missions sent by the Dalai Lama during the 1970s. These are described in John Avedon, In Exile from the Land of Snows (N.Y.: Knopf, 1984), pp. 303ff.

32. C.W. Cassinelli and Robert B. Ekvall, A Tibetan Principality: The Political System of Sa Skya (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969), p. 187. This idea is also expressed by Hugh Richardson, a British official who was stationed in Tibet prior to the Chinese invasion. According to Richardson, in the minds of Tibetans, the Dalai Lama, "being deemed the reincarnation of an aspect of the Buddha . . . has an aura of divinity; but the awe and religious devotion in which he is held are given warmth by the complete loyalty and affection of his people"; see Tibet and Its History (Boston: Shambhala, 1984), pp. 19-20.

33. The first of the Religious Kings was Srong btsan sgam po (ca. 618-650), believed to be responsible for introducing Tibetans to Buddhism.
He was succeeded by Khri srong lde brtsan (ca. 740-798) and Ral pa can (799-815). See John Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion, 1994), pp. 126ff.  

34. As Ajit Bhattacharjea describes the pre-invasion Tibetan situation, "The entire set-up was dominated by the Dalai Lama, not because his people were afraid of him, but because of their spiritual faith in his person and because he had guided their destinies with care and dignity. He made all major appointments: all significant decisions were made or cleared by him" (*The Pioneer*, April 30, 1994).  


36. For a description of the various bodies composing the Tibetan administration, see Hugh Richardson, *Tibet and Its History*, pp. 16-27.  

37. Cassinelli and Ekvall, p. 188.  

38. According to Hugh Richardson, "A Dalai Lama is, in theory, absolute; but in practice certain checks have ensured that he shall conform to the ancient customs of the country. In the first place, although he is the apex and the glory of the religious system, it is to the system that he owes his position. "A Dalai Lama is brought up exclusively by learned and influential monks and Lamas, and the weight of monastic opinion was so powerful that no Dalai Lama would risk alienating it too deeply and driving it to finding the means, which it undoubtedly could have found, of stultifying his designs." (*Tibet and Its History*, p. 20)  

39. A good example of the actual limitations on the Dalai Lama's power can be seen in the results of the program by the thirteenth Dalai Lama to modernize Tibet's educational system and military. Despite his theoretically absolute power, his reform measures were effectively scuttled by the monastic institutions in the vicinity of Lhasa. See Melvyn Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 89ff.  


43. The Chinese government denies that a population transfer is in fact taking place, but human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Asia Watch estimate that Chinese in Tibet today outnumber ethnic Tibetans by several million. This parallels the population transfer that has already taken place in Manchuria, where native Manchurians now number two million, while Han Chinese are estimated to number twenty-five million, and in Eastern Turkestan, where the native population is estimated at 7.5 million compared to 15 million Han Chinese. According to the PRC's Central Institute of Nationalities, the government's official policy is that eventually "minorities will amalgamate and disappear." See John Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion, 1994), pp. 184-185.  

Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, Chinese authorities continue to proclaim that only a few thousand Chinese with specialized backgrounds have come to Tibet, and as recently as May 18, 1994, an editorial in Xinhua asserted that "there is no such thing as population transfer in Tibet"; reported by UPI, May 18, 1994.  

44. At the European Parliament in Strasbourg on June 15, 1988, the Dalai Lama proposed a five-point peace plan as a basis for further negotiations with the PRC government on the future of Tibet. The five points were  
   1. Transformation of the whole of Tibet into a zone of peace;  
   2. Abandonment of China's population transfer policy, which threatens the very existence of the Tibetans as a people;  
   3. Respect for the Tibetan people's fundamental human rights and democratic freedoms;  
   4. Restoration and protection of Tibet's natural environment;  
   5. Commencement of earnest negotiations on the future status and relations between the Tibetan and Chinese peoples.  

Although these proposals have met with approval from other governments and political leaders, the PRC government has to date not made any concrete response to the proposal and has simply stated that it represents "an attempt to split the motherland" and interfere with China's internal affairs.  


47. To promote awareness of human rights among Tibetans, the exile government recently declared December 10 an annual Tibetan holiday commemorating International Human Rights Day, which is also the day on which the Dalai Lama received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989; reported by WTN News, December 9, 1994.


