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# American Journalism and the Tibet Question, 1950-1959

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American journalism and the Tibet Question, 1950-1959

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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### Abstract

The Tibet Question is the continuing political conflict over Tibet's status with regards to China. On one side are Tibetan nationalists and their supporters throughout the world. On the other side is the People's Republic of China. Although many scholars have examined the Tibet Question from a political or diplomatic perspective, none have addressed how everyday Americans became sympathetic to the Tibetan nationalist principles that motivate international Tibet support organizations today: that Tibet was an independent nation before 1949, that the People's Republic of China illegally conquered and occupied Tibet in 1949, and that Tibet consists of all areas that Tibetans historically inhabited.

The Tibet Question endures as a perennial issue in Sino-American relations. The following examines how American journalists shaped everyday Americans' perception of the Tibet Question from 1950 to 1959 in the absence of overt American government involvement. Using such popular print news media as *The New York Times*, among others, the following demonstrates that American journalists faced political, geographic, and technical limitations while reporting on news from Tibet. Ultimately, American journalists framed the Tibet Question within the dialectic of the Cold War, thereby creating a version of the Tibet Question that was palatable to their readers while generating sympathy for Tibetan nationalist principles. Remarkably, everyday Americans' sympathy for the Tibetan nationalist cause survives to this day.

## Introduction

The Tibet Question is the continuing political conflict over Tibet's status with regards to China. Tibetan nationalists and their supporters around the world argue that Tibet is an independent, sovereign nation under illegal Chinese occupation. The People's Republic of China (PRC) holds Tibet as an integral, inseparable part of a multi-ethnic Chinese state. Further complicating the Tibet Question, neither side agrees on Tibet's exact borders. Tibetan nationalists and their sympathizers define "Tibet" as all areas that Tibetans have historically inhabited, including the central Tibetan provinces of U-Tsang, the northeast province of Amdo, and the eastern province of Kham. This ethnic-geographic definition is sometimes called "greater" or "ethnographic" Tibet. However, the PRC defines "Tibet" as only the region that the Dalai Lama's government in Lhasa administered before 1950, which currently roughly corresponds to the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) within the PRC. This definition is also known as "political" Tibet. Today, more than half of ethnic Tibetans in the PRC reside outside of the TAR in Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces<sup>1</sup>.

In what Tibetologist Tsering Shakya calls "political myth-making," both sides in the conflict point to the same events and evidence to reach opposite conclusions about Tibet's history<sup>2</sup>. Shakya and anthropologist and Tibet scholar Melvyn C. Goldstein agree that the battle for Tibet's history often reduces historical discourse to an emotional and polemical dialectic<sup>3</sup>. As a consequence, the historiography of the Tibet Question typically falls into one of the two sides' camps. East Asian historian A. Tom Grunfeld's critics point out that

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- 1 Warren W. Smith Jr., *China's Tibet?: Autonomy or Assimilation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 24-25.
  - 2 Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1999), xxviii.
  - 3 Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, xxvii; Melvyn C. Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1999), ix-x.

he characterizes pre-1950 Tibet as a nation in bondage<sup>4</sup> and that his interpretation of Tibetan history in *The Making of Modern Tibet* “is closer than warranted to the history written by the People’s Republic of China<sup>5</sup>.” Conversely, international relations specialist and writer for Radio Free Asia Warren W. Smith Jr.’s monograph, *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations*, draws fire for being “an erudite polemic for Tibetan independence in which Smith disdains to conceal the link between his politics and his scholarship<sup>6</sup>.”

Although there exists an increasing depth of scholarship on the Tibet Question from a political or diplomatic perspective, scholars who belong to either pole of the historical debate, such as Grunfeld and Smith, or even those in between, such as Shakya and Goldstein, have not addressed how everyday Americans initially became sympathetic to the Tibetan nationalist cause. Goldstein only writes, “Although Tibet occupies a remote part of the world, the Tibet Question has captured the imagination and sympathy of many in America and the West and resonates throughout the American political landscape. It has also become a significant irritant in Sino-American relations<sup>7</sup>.” International Tibetan support organizations such as Free Tibet (founded 1987), the International Campaign for Tibet (1988), and Students for a Free Tibet (1994) base their crusade on three Tibetan nationalist principles: that Tibet was an independent, sovereign nation before 1949, that the PRC illegally invaded and occupied Tibet in 1949, and that Tibet consists of all regions that

4 Tashi Rabgey, “review of *The Making of Modern Tibet* by A. Tom Grunfeld,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 58 (May 1999), 506.

5 June Teufel Dreyer, “review of *The Making of Modern Tibet* by A. Tom Grunfeld,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 47 (May 1988), 347.

6 Barry Sautman, “review of *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations* by Warren W. Smith Jr. & *The Dragon in the Land of Snows* by Tsering Shakya,” *The China Quarterly*, vol. 171 (Sep. 2002), 774.

7 Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon*, ix.

Tibetans historically inhabited, which is why they put the beginning of the PRC's invasion in 1949 when the PRC took over administration of parts of ethnographic Tibet<sup>8</sup>.

However, these sorts of international organizations do not explain Americans' imagination and sympathy for Tibet and Tibetan nationalist principles. Rather, American news coverage of Tibet from 1950 to 1959 shaped everyday Americans' perception of the Tibet Question. Unable to witness the diplomatic goings-on behind the scenes, the American public's perception of the Tibet Question formed from what it could glean from the pages of such newspapers as the *New York Times* or such news magazines as *Time* and *Newsweek*. Piggy-backing on other international issues, Sino-Tibetan conflict during the Cold War drove journalistic discussion of Tibet and Tibet rose and fell repeatedly within the American news cycle. However, at no point did American journalists set foot inside Tibet in the 1950's. Political, geographic, and technical limitations caused the quality of journalism to suffer as American reporters often relied on unnamed or biased sources. Ultimately, American journalistic conversation of Tibet and the Tibet Question was one-sided, favoring the Tibetan nationalist interpretation over the Communist PRC's.

Discussing Tibetan history presents special problems with regards to terminology. Grunfeld writes, "In the highly emotional state of Tibetan studies, even the choice of certain terms is taken as a political statement<sup>9</sup>." For example, the PRC "conquered" and "occupied" Tibet from the Tibetan nationalist viewpoint, but from the opposite perspective, the PRC "peacefully liberated" Tibet. In a book review of Goldstein's *A History of Modern Tibet*,

8 "10 Facts About Tibet," Free Tibet, <http://www.freetibet.org/about/10-facts-about-tibet> (accessed Mar. 9, 2011); "Tibet Statistics," International Campaign for Tibet, <http://www.savetibet.org/resource-center/all-about-tibet/tibet-statistics> (accessed Mar. 9, 2011); "Tibet Today," Students for a Free Tibet, <http://www.studentsforafreetibet.org/section.php?id=27> (accessed Mar. 9, 2011); Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon*, xi.

9 A. Tom Grunfeld, *The Making of Modern Tibet*, rev. ed. (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996), 5.

*Volume 2: The Calm Before the Storm, 1951-1955*, Tibet scholar and translator Matthew Akester took issue with Goldstein's usage of the term "liberation" as normative, among other points, which launched a disagreeable debate between the two<sup>10</sup>. There is no avoiding potentially contentious terms, but emotionally neutral terms are used whenever possible. One should note that the term "invasion" is impartial. For the purposes of the following, references to Tibetan nationalism before 1959 refer to the Tibetan government in Lhasa's belief that Tibet was an independent, sovereign nation and that it held authority over ethnographic Tibet. Different transliteration conventions for both Chinese and Tibetan also pose difficulties. With regards to Chinese, names and places are presented using the *pinyin* system without tonal markings, except in the case of Hong Kong, familiar names such as Dr. Sun Yat-sen, and citations and quotations, which remain unaltered. There is no universally accepted phonetic transliteration system for the Tibetan language. Although the Wylie romanization convention transcribes *written* Tibetan faithfully, it uses groups of unpronounced consonants and therefore does not give a non-Tibetan speaker any clue as to a word's pronunciation. For that reason, Tibetan names appear in familiar romanized forms without diacritical marks. Finally, for the purposes of the following, "Tibet" refers to political Tibet unless specified otherwise.

### **Part 1: Tibet in the Post-War Press**

The specter of Communism haunted news headlines from China following victory over Japan in August 1945. Americans went to newsstands and witnessed the United States

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10 Matthew Akester, "Review of *A History of Modern Tibet, Volume 2: The Calm before the Storm, 1951-1955* by Melvyn C. Goldstein," *The Journal of the International Association of Tibet Studies [JIATS]*, no. 4 (Dec. 2008): [http://www.thlib.org/collections/texts/jiats/#jiats=/04/rev\\_goldstein/](http://www.thlib.org/collections/texts/jiats/#jiats=/04/rev_goldstein/) (accessed Mar. 13, 2011); Melvyn C. Goldstein, "Goldstein's Response to M. Akester's 'Review of *A History of Modern Tibet, Volume 2: The Calm before the Storm, 1951-1955* by Melvyn C. Goldstein,'" *JIATS*, no. 5 (Dec. 2009): [http://www.thlib.org/collections/texts/jiats/#jiats=/05/rej\\_goldstein/](http://www.thlib.org/collections/texts/jiats/#jiats=/05/rej_goldstein/) (accessed Mar. 13, 2011).



(US) gradually “lose” China to Communism. City by city, province by province, American ally Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) lost ground after the Chinese Civil War renewed in 1946, despite General George Marshall’s best efforts to form a coalition government following Japan’s surrender. During the Second World War, Japan was America’s enemy, but the post-war settlement of China posed a greater challenge to US policymakers<sup>11</sup>, and the Chinese Civil War’s resumption threatened to undo the US government’s plans for China to play a decisive role in Asia. Americans picked up their copy of the *New York Times* on June 21, 1948 and read that official sources confirmed that Communist forces had captured Kaifeng, one-time ancient capital of China and then capital of Henan province<sup>12</sup>. Shenyang followed in October, signaling Communist takeover of Manchuria. An editorial subsequently declared the Soviet Union (USSR) was guilty of betraying its obligations under the Yalta agreement to return Manchuria to the Chinese Nationalist government and support it morally and militarily. While what the editorialist called a “Russian Fifth Column” – the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) – continued its war of liberation in a “determined Russian drive<sup>13</sup>,” American attention was focused in Europe.

Three days after the *New York Times* reported Kaifeng’s fall, its readers learned of the USSR’s response to the introduction of a new Deutsche Mark (thereby economically isolating Soviet-controlled East Germany) when it cut all ground access to West Berlin and shut off half of its electricity<sup>14</sup>. By the Berlin Blockade’s end in May 1949, Tianjin, Beijing, and even the Republic of China’s (ROC) capital, Nanjing, were in Communist hands as

11 Xiaoyuan Liu, *A Partnership for Disorder: China, the United States, and Their Policies for the Postwar Disposition of the Japanese Empire, 1941-1945* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7.

12 “Kaifeng Captured by Communists,” *New York Times* [NYT], Jun. 21, 1948, 14.

13 “The Fall of Mukden,” *NYT*, Nov. 1, 1948, 22.

14 Drew Middleton, “Russians Bar Food to Western Berlin in Currency Fight,” *NYT*, Jun. 24, 1948, 1, 19.

Communist forces pushed deep into southern China. On October 1, 1949, “the nominal leader of the Chinese Communists, Mao Tze-tung, who will fill that role as long as he is amenable to the Kremlin’s instructions,” pronounced the PRC’s establishment. While an editorialist denounced the PRC’s inauguration as a “farce<sup>15</sup>,” several thousand kilometers away the Tibetan government in Lhasa grew increasingly nervous faced with the possibility of imminent “liberation.”

With other international issues dominating news media attention and the situation within Tibet still peaceful, Tibet appeared in print only irregularly with almost no discussion of the Tibet Question. Before 1950, American journalists acquainted their readers with events in Tibet, but a good deal of exoticism and paternalism peppered the coverage. For instance, as Lhasa prepared for the young, four-and-a-half-year-old Fourteenth Dalai Lama’s coronation in 1940, an article in *Time* magazine portrayed Lhasa as “a dirty, disagreeable town” where either the British or Chinese were responsible for what little modern improvements existed. Tibetan women, according to the same article, were among the ugliest in the world while Tibetans of both sexes suffered an estimated ninety-nine percent venereal disease rate, doubtlessly the result of all the manners of sexual perversion that Tibetans practiced<sup>16</sup>. Tibet was more of a curiosity in the news rather than an international issue. Along with seeing advertisements for “fabled fleeces” from such far away places as Persia, Peru, and Tibet on sale at Saks Fifth Avenue<sup>17</sup>, Americans filled-in their *New York Times* crossword puzzles with answers such as “Lhasa” (20 Down, “Capital of Tibet”)<sup>18</sup> and read reports of savage Tibetan tribesmen possibly enslaving American airmen who survived

15 “Red Rule in Peiping,” *NYT*, Oct. 2, 1949, E8.

16 “Kokonor Kid,” *Time*, vol. 35 (Feb. 26, 1940), 53.

17 Saks Fifth Avenue, “Sun and Snow Whites by Strock,” *NYT*, Feb. 4, 1947, 8.

18 Louis Baron, “Puzzles: Here, There, Everywhere,” *NYT*, Mar 31, 1946, 118.

crash landing in southeastern Tibet while flying over “the Hump” carrying supplies from British-controlled India to Nationalist forces in Chongqing during the Second World War<sup>19</sup>.

## I

*New York Times* coverage of the 1948 Tibetan Trade Mission to the US epitomized American journalistic conversation of Tibet from 1945 to 1949. On August 11, 1948, five Tibetans wearing the latest in American men’s summer fashion assembled on the sixtieth floor of the Empire State Building. There they gave an interview to fourteen New York news reporters and described plans to develop direct trade relations with the US. According to an unnamed *New York Times* reporter, “The press representatives fortified with hastily gleaned reference book data, began in serious vein,” but the questions they asked turned from matters of the estimated two million dollars worth of trade between the US and Tibet to the less serious: “Was it true that even the poorest Tibetans were decked out in gold nuggets? What are yak tails used for, and is it true that they are good material for Santa Clause whiskers? What kinds of American foods did the visitors like?” and the inevitable, “Had Tibetans seen ‘*Lost Horizon*’<sup>20</sup>?” The New York reporters obviously thought that their readers would be more interested in the spectacle of the Tibetans themselves rather than the miniscule amount of trade between Tibet and the US or prospects for increased trade.

With the aid of an interpreter, the smiling head of the delegation, Tibetan Finance Minister *Tsepon* W. D. Shakabpa<sup>21</sup>, indicated that he enjoyed American food. Although he had not seen the 1937 film adaptation of James Hilton’s novel *Lost Horizon*, he was apparently familiar with the term “Shangri-La” from Americans repeatedly asking him the

19 “Americans Reported Enslaved in Tibet,” *NYT*, Feb. 22, 1946, 10.

20 “5 From Tibet Here to Drum Up Trade,” *NYT*, Aug. 12, 1948, 43. Italics added.

21 “*Tsepon*” was Wangchuck Deden Shakabpa's title as one of the four lay heads of the Tibetan Revenue Office. He was often described in news media as “Tibet’s Finance Minister.”

same question. The American public followed the curious story of Tibet's first mission to the US, whose ostensible goal was securing American customers and dollars for Tibetan exports ranging from wool to yak tails. However, the Tibetans also wanted to be treated as a formal foreign delegation and the American public was unaware of the delicate diplomatic situation the delegation caused. All that Americans could glean of it from the *New York Times* coverage of the 1948 Tibetan Trade Mission was that the delegates claimed that Tibet was no longer a Chinese dependency, but the reference books with which the *New York Times* reporter had fortified himself stated otherwise<sup>22</sup>.

The Trade Mission's purpose was first, to purchase gold to back up Tibet's paper currency and second, to gain access to foreign currency<sup>23</sup>. To that extent, it succeeded; the Tibetans secured \$400,000 in gold and the right to both import goods through Calcutta, India duty free and keep American dollars from exports<sup>24</sup>. It was not successful, however, in being formally treated as a delegation from a sovereign state. Although the five Tibetans believed they traveled to the US using Tibetan passports<sup>25</sup>, the US State Department actually regarded them as passports issued by a foreign government that the US government did not recognize<sup>26</sup>. The ROC protested the very idea of a Tibetan mission from the start, saying that the Tibetan government officials had no authority to negotiate with a foreign country, no right to travel without Chinese passports, and demanded to know under what circumstances the US issued the delegation visas and whether or not the US had changed its "usual attitude

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22 "5 From Tibet Here to Drum Up Trade," *NYT*, Aug. 12, 1948, 43.

23 Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 571.

24 Grunfeld, *The Making of Modern Tibet*, 91.

25 Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 295.

26 US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947, vol. VII, The Far East: China* (Washington D. C.: US Government Printing Office, 1972), 604. (Cited hereafter as *FRUS* followed by the appropriate year, volume, and page numbers)

toward Tibet.” When the US nevertheless granted the Mission visas, it afterward informed the ROC that their issuance did not constitute formal recognition of Tibet and the US retained its stance that Tibet was a part of China<sup>27</sup>. In effect, the US officially regarded the Tibetan Trade Mission as unofficial. When the Tibetans wanted to meet with President Harry Truman and deliver letters and gifts from the Dalai Lama and his cabinet, the *Kashag*, the ROC insisted its Ambassador to the US, V. K. Wellington Koo (Gu Weijun), be present. At this the Tibetans balked, but the US still wanted to extend every courtesy and so the Tibetans instead met with Secretary of State George Marshall as consolation (Marshall became Secretary of State in early 1947). Even though the US government was willing to deal with Tibet as if it were an independent state when the moment required, as it did when hosting the 1948 Tibetan Trade Mission, the US still officially maintained that Tibet was a part of China and the American press represented it no differently.

American journalists were simply not interested in discussing the Tibet Question before 1950. Tibet was exotic, and occasionally newsworthy for that fact alone, but the American press portrayed Tibet as part of the American-allied ROC with little analysis when the opportunity presented itself. Journalists certainly missed opportunities when the 1948 Tibetan Trade Mission visited New York City. They missed another perfect opportunity when the Tibetan government expelled the ROC mission in Lhasa – the ROC’s token expression of authority – in what the *New York Times* described as a “revolt against China<sup>28</sup>.” The newspaper’s initial reports suggested it was a Communist-inspired revolt, but the *New York Times* eventually explained that the Tibetan government was worried about Communist

27 *FRUS, 1948, vol. VII, The Far East: China*, 759-760.

28 “Revolt against China is Reported in Tibet,” *NYT*, Jul. 23, 1949, 1.

infiltration among the mission's disaffected members<sup>29</sup>. Indeed, Lhasa was full of spies, both Nationalist and Communist, and the Tibetan government, anxious from news of Communist successes to the east, summoned the head of the ROC Mission on July 8, 1949 to inform him that he had two weeks to leave. The Tibetan government also expelled anyone else suspected of being a spy<sup>30</sup>. All that the *New York Times* initially had to say about Tibet's status *vis-à-vis* China was that the ROC claimed sovereignty over Tibet<sup>31</sup>, but then later explained, "China for years has maintained a small mission in Lhasa to signify legal sovereignty, never exercised in practice, over the country ruled by Buddhist priests in the name of the Dalai Lama, currently a teen-aged boy<sup>32</sup>."

## II

The worlds of celebrity and politics then strangely merged when news broke that a horse had thrown Lowell Thomas, famous American reporter, broadcaster, and writer, while traveling through Tibet. Perhaps best known for his sensational coverage of T.E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia") the fifty-seven-year-old intrepid world traveler seriously injured himself in late September 1949 as he and his son, Lowell Thomas Jr., returned to India from Lhasa through the Karo Pass, south of Gyantse<sup>33</sup>. Limping on crutches, he returned to the US with tales of his stay in Lhasa, his meeting with the Dalai Lama, his death-defying survival after breaking his leg, and the fear gripping the religious, monarchical government of Tibet – that Tibet's ancient religion and customs would soon come to an end. "Tibet," Thomas said during an interview on board the American rescue plane sent from the US

29 "India to Sift Tibet Rumor," *NYT*, Jul. 24, 1949, 24; "Tibet Revolt Explained," *NYT*, Jul. 25, 1949, 5.

30 Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*, 611-612.

31 "India to Sift Tibet Rumor," *NYT*, Jul. 24, 1949, 24.

32 "Tibet Revolt Explained," *NYT*, Jul. 25, 1949, 5.

33 "Lowell Thomas Thrown by Horse in Himalayas," *NYT*, Sep. 24, 1949, 5.

Embassy in New Dehli, “is the most anti-Communist country in the world<sup>34</sup>.” By accident, Tibet found its first celebrity spokesperson and advocate. Stepping off of the plane at La Guardia airport in New York City, Thomas immediately spoke of the US giving the Tibetans guerrilla training and modern weapons, “which would make it more difficult for the Chinese Communists to approach on the North,” as well as establishing a US mission in Lhasa. He also carried with him parchment and verbal messages from the Dalai Lama and his regent to Truman and Secretary of State Dean Acheson<sup>35</sup>. Thomas, as a well-established reporter and broadcaster, had the American press’ ear and the American public’s by extension. According to Thomas, “all Tibetans regarded their isolated land as entirely sovereign and separate from China despite that country’s claim to some sort of suzerainty<sup>36</sup>.”

After Mao Zedong proclaimed the PRC’s establishment in October 1949, he also stated that the CCP had not yet finished the task of liberating China. Despite vast ideological differences, both the CCP and Chinese Nationalist Party (GMD) regarded Tibet as an integral part of China. However, the Tibetan government in Lhasa disagreed. Although no foreign government ever recognized Tibet as a sovereign nation, after the Qing dynasty’s collapse in 1912 and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama afterward expelled all Chinese troops and officials, the Tibetan government exercised *de facto* independence without interference from either Yuan Shikai, briefly President of the ROC in the early 1910’s, or Jiang, who took over leadership of the GMD following Sun Yat-sen’s (Sun Zhongshan’s) death in 1925<sup>37</sup>. The ROC never exercised any practical power inside Tibet where it

34 Robert Trumbull, “Tibet Fears Told by Lowell Thomas,” *NYT*, Oct. 11, 1949, 21.

35 “Lowell Thomas Back from Tibet,” *NYT*, Oct. 17, 1949, 25.

36 Robert Trumbull, “Tibet Fears Told by Lowell Thomas,” *NYT*, Oct. 11, 1949, 21.

37 Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon*, 30, 34, 36.

claimed authority, but the PRC was determined to change the *status quo*. Unlike the ROC, the new Communist government had the means as well as the will.

### III

Before late 1949, Tibet did not have much relevance to journalistic discussion of the Cold War, the dominant international news story during the 1945-1949 period. That began to change when Americans read that the CCP vowed, shortly before the PRC's founding, to "liberate all Chinese territory, including Tibet, Sinkiang, Hainan Island and Taiwan (Formosa) and will not permit a single inch of territory to remain outside the rule of the Chinese People's Republic<sup>38</sup>." Tibet then joined the American news cycle with news coverage of Thomas' escapade, on which the *New York Times* published regularly, catalyzing American interest in what was previously a mysterious, exotic, remote corner of the world. Although Thomas established the precedent of American celebrities campaigning for Tibetan nationalism, American sympathy for the Tibetan nationalist cause did not yet emerge so long as the Sino-Tibetan *status quo* remained unthreatened.

#### **Part 2: Invasion to Liberation, 1950-1951**

At the beginning of 1950, the PRC publicly reiterated its intention to liberate Tibet<sup>39</sup>. In October, the PRC demonstrated that it would fulfill that intention by force if Lhasa did not peacefully negotiate Tibet's integration with China. After the People's Liberation Army (PLA) crossed the Sino-Tibetan border in the first week of October and defeated the

38 "Chinese Reds Promise the 'Liberation' of Tibet," *NYT*, Sep. 3, 1949, 5.

39 Robert W. Ford, *Captured in Tibet*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1; Harrison E. Salisbury, "Soviet Backs Mao on Formosa Claim, Press Also Maintains Hainan, Tibet Are Part of China – Cites 1943 Cairo Accord" *NYT*, Jan. 5, 1950, 19. The declaration came in a New Year's announcement, which also mentioned Taiwan and Hainan. Radio operator Robert Ford was the first Tibetan government official to hear the announcement.



outnumbered, poorly trained, and ineptly-led Tibetan army at Qamdo, the PLA halted<sup>40</sup>. Militarily unifying Tibet with the “Chinese motherland” and “expelling imperialists who sought to keep Tibet separate” was actually the PRC’s last resort. There was nothing stopping the PLA from continuing straight to Lhasa, but Chairman Mao believed that the best way the PRC could integrate Tibet required Lhasa’s participation<sup>41</sup>. The PLA even released three officials captured at Qamdo to facilitate talks. Lhasa had been in diplomatic contact with Beijing since the beginning of 1950, but refused to send representatives to negotiate on Beijing’s terms. Instead, the Tibetan government hoped to delay the PRC as long as possible in effort to attract foreign assistance from the US, the United Kingdom (UK), India, or the United Nations (UN)<sup>42</sup>. Lhasa had little choice but to finally send delegates to Beijing when its appeal to the UN failed. On May 23, 1951, Tibet’s delegates signed the Seventeen Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet.

Contemporaneous to the PRC’s invasion and unification of Tibet, the Korean People’s Army (KPA) of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel to unify the peninsula on June 25, 1950. Although Korea was of no strategic value to the US militarily, and even though both General Douglas MacArthur in December 1949 and Acheson in January 1950 had put it outside of the US defense perimeter in the Pacific, it was of utmost importance politically, if only as a substitute for a seemingly failed American effort in China. Korea was a symbol of American commitment to contain Communism and

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40 Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon*, 45; Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 32. There is some confusion regarding the actual date of the PLA’s invasion. Goldstein puts the invasion’s beginning on October 7 whereas Shakya puts October 6. “Qamdo” is also frequently romanized as “Chamdo.”

41 Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon*, 44.

42 *Ibid.*, 41-46

protect its allies<sup>43</sup>. The US led the UN Command to repulse the KPA in what Truman officially labeled a “police action<sup>44</sup>.” After UN forces held on to their foothold at Pusan through summer 1950, outmaneuvered the KPA at Inchon beginning September 15, and pushed the front lines beyond the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in October, the PRC then overtly intervened nearly simultaneously as it invaded Tibet. In the American public’s mind, the Korean War and invasion of Tibet were not only related, but also signaled a new era of Communist expansionism in Asia.

Throughout 1950 and into 1951, a series of events pushed Tibet into the American news cycle: Sino-Tibetan negotiations, the invasion of Tibet, the Tibetan appeal to the UN, the Dalai Lama’s flight to Yadong near the border with Sikkim, and the ultimate signing of the Seventeen Point Agreement all caused American news media to discuss the Tibet Question. Meanwhile, the Dalai Lama became something of a celebrity as the press tracked his flight from Lhasa as well as his eventual return. During the 1950-1951 period, Tibet’s isolation and underdevelopment affected the way journalists reported the news from inside Tibet, and not typically for the better. Journalists were not privy to details of international diplomacy and, as a consequence, the American public only caught a glimpse of the Tibet Question’s nuances. Tibet emerged from the 1950-1951 period as a symbol of Communist aggression and a part of world-wide Communist expansion during an era of fear concerning Soviet intent, but unlike other areas of the world, American public interest in Tibet developed independently of government involvement.

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43 Charles M. Dobbs, *The Unwanted Symbol: American Foreign Policy, the Cold War, and Korea, 1945-1950* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1981), 108.

44 Anthony Leviero, “U.S. ‘Not at War’ President Asserts,” *NYT*, Jun. 30, 1950, 1, 7.

## I

In the beginning of 1950, Americans looked to the Asian front of the Cold War with uneasiness. Even mysterious, exotic, and remote Tibet became a front in the Cold War against Communism's expansion within the American psyche. A January 23 editorial article in the *New York Times* spelled out American trepidations before Korea became an international crisis:

Current indications of expansionist aims on the part of the Chinese Communists naturally cause increasing uneasiness in all neighboring countries. It has long been established that Moscow is committed to a program of Communist revolutions in Southeast Asia, but just how far the Chinese Communists will be the military instruments of such a program has not been determined.

The editorial focused on French Indo-China as “the most sensitive spot” of anticipated Communist expansion. The article also mentioned Thailand and Tibet as targets and the writer hypothesized that Red China might expand into Tibet and Southeast Asia as compensation for deferring to the USSR in the north<sup>45</sup>. The editorial came at a time when Americans were still digesting their “loss” of China. *New York Times* foreign correspondent, first female member of the newspaper's editorial staff, and Pulitzer Prize winner Anne O'Hare McCormick asked in another editorial, “What will we do next in Asia<sup>46</sup>?” In a fateful address to the National Press Club in Washington D. C. on January 12, 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson publicly addressed the question “What is the situation in regard to the military security of the Pacific area and what is our policy in regard to it?” In his remarks, Acheson described a perimeter for US national defense that ran from the Aleutian Islands, through Japan and its Ryukyu Islands, and down to the Philippines.

45 “At China's Borders,” *NYT*, Jan. 23, 1950, 17.

46 Anne O'Hare McCormick, “While Moscow Charts a Course for Asia,” *NYT*, Jan. 23, 1950, 17.

Critically, Acheson did not include Korea, Taiwan, or any other location on or near the East Asian mainland in his statement. Tibet was not an issue because it was beyond US strategic interests in the Pacific region. To many Americans, it seemed as if his answer to American commitment on the Asian continent was non-commitment. Republicans in Congress were already fuming at Acheson for being soft on Communism and refusing to send aid to Chiang's regime on Taiwan. At the end of the address to the National Press Club, someone asked "why the Republican leaders are so intent on intervening in the hopeless China situation when they opposed the Truman plan for Europe[?]," to which Acheson answered, "one of the sound rules of ancient justice was that the wise thing for a court to do was to observe the limits of its jurisdiction<sup>47</sup>." Acheson refused to bait the Truman administration's Republican opponents, but if Americans thought that he also refused to give a definite policy towards the defense of other areas of Pacific Asia, they failed to understand his words' significance at the time:

So far as the military security of other areas in the Pacific is concerned, it must be clear that no person can guarantee these areas against military attack. But it must be clear that such a guarantee is hardly sensible or necessary within the realm of practical relationship. Should such an attack occur – one hesitates to say where such an armed attack could come from – the *initial* reliance must be on the people attacked to resist it *and then* upon the commitments of the entire civilized world under the Charter of the United Nations which so far has not proved a weak reed to lean on by any people who are determined to protect their independence against aggression<sup>48</sup>.

The manner in which the American press portrayed the USSR as intrinsically belligerent continued from the late 1940's in the aftermath of the Truman Doctrine, the Berlin Blockade and Airlift, and the Marshall Plan throughout the 1950-1951 period. The

47 Walter H. Waggoner, "Four Areas Listed," *NYT*, Jan. 13, 1950, 1.

48 "Remarks by Dean Acheson before the National Press Club, ca. 1950," 2; Harry S. Truman Administration; Elsey Papers; Harry S. Truman Library & Museum. Italics added for emphasis

idea that the USSR and its “puppets” were constantly seeking to expand corresponded with Truman’s own perception that Communism was analogous to the Axis Powers of the Second World War<sup>49</sup>. Within that rationale, Tibet seemed like just another one of Moscow’s targets. Another editorial article at the beginning of 1950 concerned Afghanistan and Tibet. Calling Tibet “ripe for the plucking by Chinese Communists,” the editorial highlighted fear of Communist expansion in Central Asia that would then spill over into “chaotic, bankrupt Burma, to endangered Indo-China, to bandit-ridden Malaya, to the birthpangs of the new United States of Indonesia. But all roads lead to Moscow these days; the problems really boil down to one problem – Soviet Communist expansionism<sup>50</sup>.”

At the time, Americans still considered the PRC as another Soviet satellite doing Moscow’s will. The *New York Times* pointed out the link between Soviet and “Red Chinese” expansionism into Tibet when it forwarded *Trud* newspapers’ statement that “Now the hour of final liberation of Tibet is not far off<sup>51</sup>.” This Soviet talk of liberating Tibet stemmed from Premier Zhou Enlai’s visit to Moscow to conclude a Sino-Soviet alliance in early 1950<sup>52</sup>. According to C. L. Sulzberger, then chief foreign correspondent for the *New York Times*, winner of a special Pulitzer Prize citation in 1951, later a prolific writer of books on US foreign policy, and member of the family that owned the newspaper<sup>53</sup>, Moscow sought expansion into Asia while the US focused on Europe. Sulzberger described thirteen coordinated techniques that the Soviet Union used to satiate its imperialist desires in Asia, such as war and skillful diplomacy in the case of the Sakhalin and Kurile Islands, political

49 Rosemary Foot, *The Wrong War: American Policy and the Dimension of the Korean Conflict, 1950-1953* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 32.

50 “The Roof of the World,” *NYT*, Jan. 25, 1950, 24.

51 Harrison E. Salisbury, “Soviet Press Sees Tibet ‘Freed’ Soon,” *NYT*, Jan. 28, 1950, 4.

52 C. L. Sulzberger, “Soviet Seen Prodding Mao to Turn Army Southward,” *NYT*, Jan 24, 1950, 12.

53 Robert D. McFadden, “C. L. Sulzberger, Columnist, Dies at 80,” *NYT*, Sep. 21, 1993, B9.

seizure of leadership of nationalist movements as in Vietnam, and “Efforts to induce paralysis by implied force as exemplified by the warnings to Tibet that it should yield to Peiping.” Sulzberger also explained that the USSR avoided areas too strong to easily succumb to pressure – Finland, Yugoslavia, Turkey – and left weak areas – Afghanistan, South Korea – alone because they would always be “available<sup>54</sup>.”

Also at the beginning of 1950, the Red Scare and the era of McCarthyism began after Americans learned that their enemy had apparently infiltrated their own government. In late January, a jury convicted Alger Hiss, a former respected US State Department official of ten years and head of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, of two counts of perjury for lying to a Congressional committee. Hiss denied under oath that he ever passed secret documents to a known Communist spy, Whitaker Chambers, or that he had contact with him during the time in question. Hiss escaped charges of treason and espionage only because of a three-year statute of limitations<sup>55</sup>. The confession of a British scientist named Klaus Fuchs that he passed atomic secrets to the USSR followed the very next month. The *New York Times* published a portion of the confession read in court, which showed that Fuchs was a Marxist sympathizer and possibly mentally ill<sup>56</sup>. The very next day after the *New York Times* published Fuchs’ confession, it reported that a hitherto little-known junior Republican senator from Wisconsin named Joseph McCarthy had a list of fifty-seven Communists known to the government and still working in the US State Department<sup>57</sup>.

54 C. L. Sulzberger, “Soviet Pushes East as U. S. Eyes Europe,” *NYT*, May 28, 1950, 1.

55 William R. Conklin, “Hiss Guilty on Both Counts; Betrayal of U. S. Secrets is Affirmed; Sentence Wednesday; Limit 10 Years,” *NYT*, Jan 22, 1950, 1.

56 “Text of Fuchs' Confession as Read in Court,” *NYT*, Feb. 11, 1950, 2.

57 “McCarthy Insists Truman Oust Reds,” *NYT*, Feb. 12, 1950, 5.

Without any proof at all and for personal political gain, he began a brief reign of terror that today bears his name.

## II

Coverage of Sino-Tibetan negotiations to resolve the Tibet Question under a perceived threat of Communist expansionism began serious journalistic discussion of Tibet. In January 1950, negotiations between Lhasa and Beijing commenced. The Tibetan government made the first move to initiate discussions with the PRC over Tibet's status *vis-à-vis* China<sup>58</sup>, but the American public heard about the Lhasa-Beijing negotiations differently. The *New York Times* reported that the "Reds" demanded Tibet send a delegation to Beijing without delay to submit peacefully, or else<sup>59</sup>. Not long after, the *New York Times* published an article on a PRC radio broadcast which stated the Chinese people "will not tolerate it...if Lhasa authorities obstinately stick to their errors and continue to submit themselves to American imperialism," and then offering "appropriate regional autonomy" to Tibetans<sup>60</sup>. In actuality, both sides were eager to non-violently resolve the Tibet Question and the Tibetan government appointed Shakabpa to head a delegation to negotiate with the PRC, which departed in February. The Tibetan Foreign Bureau fatefully issued each delegate member a Tibetan passport, just as the Foreign Bureau had done with the previous 1948 Tibetan Trade

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58 Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*, 644-645. Americans were unaware that the Tibetan government in Lhasa opened negotiations with the PRC for the first time through Gyalo Thodup's – one of the Dalai Lama's elder brothers – father-in-law, Zhu Shigui. Zhu, a former ROC general who shifted allegiance to the PRC following Jiang's permanent exile to Taiwan, apparently forwarded Lhasa's request asking for negotiations over the Tibet Question on neutral ground.

59 "Tibet Gets Order to Bow to Peiping: Chinese Reds Demand Lhasa Send Mission to Fix Status" *NYT*, Jan. 22, 1950, 11.

60 "Tibet Told to Negotiate," *NYT*, Jan. 31, 1950, 3.

Mission<sup>61</sup>. At the same time, another Tibetan mission to the US, the UK, India, and Nepal seeking foreign assistance fell apart when neither the US nor the UK proved receptive<sup>62</sup>.

Unlike the 1948 Tibetan Trade Mission to the US, the 1950 delegation received a good deal of American press coverage, probably because of the perceived Communist threat to Tibet, a non-Communist “country.” On May 23, 1950, Americans read *New York Times* Hong Kong correspondent Walter Sullivan’s article about an English language broadcast from Beijing that began with the PRC’s offer of peaceful liberation and regional autonomy to the Dalai Lama. The broadcast also contained a thinly veiled threat which urged the Dalai Lama and Tibetans to prevent “unnecessary losses” and not to rely on either British or American imperialists for aid. Tibet’s rough terrain and isolation were allegedly no obstacle because both the Long March and Hainan’s recent liberation demonstrated that nothing was out of the PLA’s reach. The broadcast was both an invitation and a warning. Beijing radio assured Tibetans that the PRC respected minority nationality people’s rights, including the freedom of religion, and cited the good treatment that Tibetans and Tibetan monasteries were receiving in PRC-controlled territory. At the same time, the PRC knew that Tibet was seeking foreign assistance from its enemies. Sullivan, then a foreign correspondent for the *New York Times* who later became the newspaper’s science news editor and the first journalist to receive the Public Service Medal of the National Academy of Sciences<sup>63</sup>, noted in his report on the broadcast that “Only last Sunday the Dalai Lama’s brother, Gyalo Thondup,

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61 Shakyas, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 27.

62 Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*, 633-634.

63 John Noble Wilford, “Walter Sullivan, 78, Dies; Showed Science at Its Most Daring,” *NYT*, Mar. 20, 1996, D24. Sullivan was also a foreign correspondent for the *New York Times* in Korea and Berlin. He won the Daly Medal of the American Geographical Society, the George Polk Award, the Distinguished Public Service Award of the National Science Foundation, and many more. The American Geophysical Union named its science writing award in his honor.



conferred with Chiang Kai-shek in Formosa, presumably on the future of Tibet<sup>64</sup>.” By the time the American public read Sullivan’s report on the May 23 broadcast, the Tibetan delegation had been in India for a month and the PRC was eager to resolve the Tibet Question promptly.

The English language broadcast from Beijing was actually a rebroadcast of a May 6 message by Geshe Sherab Gyatso, who was then Vice-Chairman of the newly established Qinghai provincial government. His participation was part of the PRC’s strategy to utilize Tibetans, especially such religious figures as himself and the Panchen Lama, to assure the Tibetan government and Tibetans themselves that the PRC respected religious freedom. What made the broadcast that Sullivan covered different from the one that the *New York Times* reported on in January was that the earlier message explicitly threatened the Tibetan government with force for the first time. In hindsight, it was perhaps the PRC’s final warning<sup>65</sup>.

However, the Tibetan government remained unconvinced and the PRC’s tactic of implied force played out in the American press as just part of a coordinated Soviet strategy of imperialism and expansion in Asia<sup>66</sup>. The reason Beijing radio decided to rebroadcast the May 6 message in English is unknown. Presumably, the PRC wanted to demonstrate that it had a legitimate interest in Tibet because the PRC, like the ROC, claimed Tibet as a part of China. In any case, the American public was unaware of the Tibetan government’s role in

64 Walter Sullivan, “China’s Reds Offer Autonomy to Tibet,” *NYT*, May 23, 1950, 1, 20.

65 Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 37. “Geshe” is a title that signifies the bearer holds the highest religious academic degree, roughly corresponding to a doctorate of theology. Shakya describes Gyatso as the former abbot of Sera Je Monastery in Lhasa, meaning the Sera Je College within Sera monastery.

Goldstein’s description differs. He describes him as a monk and scholar of Drepung Monastery [Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*, 523]. In either case, Gyatso was a well-known monk and scholar.

66 C. L. Sulzberger, “Soviet Pushes East as U. S. Eyes Europe,” *NYT*, May 28, 1950, 1, 20.

initiating negotiations. From early coverage of the Sino-Tibetan negotiations, Americans understood that the Communist PRC was trying to bully non-Communist Tibet into submission.

Just as the 1948 Tibetan Trade Mission caused a diplomatic row over Tibet's status, the 1950 delegation raised the same complication when Tibetan officials again attempted to travel with Tibetan passports. However, this time the American press caught part of the controversy and pushed it into journalistic discussion. Although the PRC invited the Tibetan delegation to Beijing to peacefully discuss Tibet's status with regards to China, the Tibetans instead wanted to meet on neutral ground, such as in British-controlled Hong Kong. The Tibetans were due in Hong Kong to meet with a PRC representative on June 5, 1950. However, on June 6 the *New York Times* reported the surprising news that Indian police stopped the Tibetans from boarding a plane from Calcutta to Hong Kong because they did not have the proper visas<sup>67</sup>. The delegation then found itself stuck in India without acceptable travel documents to continue its mission and the American public followed their travails.

Even though much of the diplomatic controversy remained behind the scenes, out of public view, the argument over the Tibetans' passports provoked better coverage and insight into the heart of the matter: the Tibet Question. Following the story, former *New York Times* war correspondent turned foreign correspondent Robert Trumbull, who later wrote almost a dozen books on Asia and the Pacific<sup>68</sup>, reported from New Delhi that the British canceled the Tibetans' visas because they worried that the delegates would "hand over Tibet to the

67 "Tibetans Halted in India," *NYT*, Jun. 6, 1950, 16.

68 Eric Pace, "Robert Trumbull Dies at 80, Reported on War for Times," *NYT*, Oct. 13, 1992, B6.

Communists on a silver platter.” The British also did not want the crown colony of Hong Kong to facilitate such a development. They suggested to the Tibetans that they wait for Beijing’s Ambassador to India to arrive, negotiate with him, and leave their colony, which was situated precariously next to the PRC, out of the whole affair<sup>69</sup>.

Trumbull’s article accurately described much of the controversy to its audience, but lacked key details behind the British Foreign Office’s decision to prevent the Tibetan delegation from traveling to Hong Kong. This was not a case of faulty reporting because such details rested in the diplomatic correspondence between all the sides involved. Before the Tibetan delegation arrived in India in early April, Lhasa asked the Indian government to issue its delegates diplomatic visas. The Indians then turned around and asked the British<sup>70</sup>. Just as Trumbull’s article stated, the British Foreign Office was worried about the result of possible Sino-Tibetan negotiations. Discussing whether or not to grant the Tibetan delegation diplomatic passports, one Foreign Office Far East Department official doubted that anything good could come from it. He predicted as soon as Communist troops entered Tibet, the PRC would disregard anything signed on paper. The same official also pointed out that if Hong Kong hosted talks, the UK would become open to further accusations of imperialism – that Tibet was merely a British puppet state (although he suggested Singapore as a venue rather than Hong Kong). Critically, he argued that because the UK did not recognize Tibet as an independent state, but also not as a part of China, either, the Tibetans should not receive visas on Tibetan or Chinese passports. Another Foreign Office official

69 Robert Trumbull, “Tibet Delegates Vow Independence,” *NYT*, Jun. 15, 1950, 18.

70 Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*, 645.

disagreed, responding that because the PRC's takeover of Tibet was inevitable, the UK should at least try to allow for peaceful negotiations rather than cause futile bloodshed<sup>71</sup>.

Whereas the diplomatic wrangling around the 1948 Tibetan Trade Mission produced no visible controversy in American newspapers, the 1950 Tibetan delegation helped push the question of Tibet's status into public view. Although Trumbull did not have all the details, he summarized the Tibet Question to his audience while following the delegation's story saying, "The 'nominal suzerainty' of China over Tibet is recognized by numerous foreign powers, but not by the Tibetans themselves<sup>72</sup>." The root of the problem implicitly emerged from press coverage of the visa controversy: no foreign nation recognized the passports the delegation carried because no foreign nation recognized Tibet as an independent state (but not entirely dependent, either). By the time the British Foreign Office finally concluded it would not stamp visas on the Tibetans' passports, the Tibetan delegation had already made travel plans to Hong Kong where a PRC representative waited and probably intended to guide the Tibetans to Beijing. However, due to a miscommunication the West Bengal government in India nevertheless stamped the Tibetan passports<sup>73</sup>. When the UK canceled the visas, stranding the delegates in India, a multi-lateral exchange between the UK, India, and the Tibetan delegation ensued. Each side countered the others' suggestions for the Sino-Tibetan negotiation's venue. Meanwhile, the governors of Hong Kong and Singapore objected to hosting the Tibetan delegates in their colonies and the Tibetans grew impatient. They tried to impress upon the other parties their mission's urgency because they were

71 Cited in Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*, 646-647.

72 Robert Trumbull, "Tibet Offers Mao Negotiation Plan," Jul. 30, 1950, 26.

73 Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*, 649. West Bengal handled such paperwork for the UK.

receiving reports of fighting in eastern Tibet<sup>74</sup>. Regardless, they had to accept the idea of negotiating with the PRC's ambassador to India after he was due to arrive in late August 1950<sup>75</sup>.

Diplomatically speaking, the UK was stuck between a rock and a hard place. If it recognized the Tibetan passports, it would signal to the PRC that the UK recognized Tibet as a sovereign nation at a time when the UK was trying to mend fences with the new Communist government. Issuing visas on the passports also might have implied that the UK supported Tibet's claim of independence. On the other hand, if the UK refused the Tibetan delegation travel documentation, then the Foreign Office believed it might hasten Tibet's doom by not allowing peaceful talks. In the end, the 1950 Tibetan delegation never made it to Hong Kong.

The delegation waited until September 16 to meet with Ambassador Yuan Zhongxian, who rejected any notion of Tibetan independence. He gave the delegation three points to especially consider from the Common Program of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference: first, Lhasa must accept that Tibet is part of the PRC; second, Lhasa must accept the PRC's responsibility for national defense; third, Lhasa must accept the PRC's responsibility for trade and international relations. Shakabpa forwarded the three points to the Tibetan government with his recommendation that it accept the PRC's proposal with modifications to be discussed later. However, Lhasa rejected the very idea and still clung to the hope that outside assistance would save Tibet. Both Shakabpa and the PRC

74 *FRUS, 1950, vol. VI, East Asia and the Pacific*, 362.

75 Shakyas, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 28; Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*, 648-649.

later publicly blamed the UK for the invasion of Tibet by not granting the Tibetan delegation visas<sup>76</sup>.

### III

While the Tibetan delegation remained in India, to the American public it appeared the PRC was preparing to strike regardless of negotiations. Reports slowly filtered in saying that Communist forces were already inside Tibet. As early as March 1950, a nine hundred man PLA force reportedly took control of a Tibetan village on the Sino-Kashmiri border<sup>77</sup>. Later in July, the *New York Times* forwarded reports from Taiwan that quoted “well-informed sources” who stated that twenty thousand troops under Peng Dehuai’s First Field Army had crossed into Tibet from Xinjiang<sup>78</sup>. The report’s origin was sketchy and both the Indian government and the Tibetan delegation stuck in India denied the report.

Reports that the PRC was intensifying preparations to invade Tibet were accurate on many accounts. The PRC initially adopted a conciliatory stance towards Tibet and utilized Tibetan members of what *New York Times* correspondent Henry R. Lieberman called “the Communist fold” to its advantage, such as Tibetan youth and political workers<sup>79</sup>. The CCP had a small Tibetan membership on which it was quick to capitalize. These Tibetans were from areas beyond Lhasa’s control in eastern or ethnographic Tibet. Included among them were long-time members whom the CCP recruited when it crossed into ethnically Tibetan areas during the Long March. Most were poor or nationalistic, or both, who found the CCP’s message of a unified and prosperous Tibet appealing. Others, such as the Geta Rimpoche of Beri Monastery in the Tibetan province of Kham chose the side that they

76 Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 30-32.

77 “Chinese Troops Hold Tibet Village,” *NYT*, Mar. 12, 1950, 1.

78 “Peiping Force of 20,000 Reported Inside Tibet,” Jul. 14, 1950, 6.

79 Henry R. Lieberman, “Invasion of Tibet by Mao Held Near,” *NYT*, Jul. 23, 1950, 14.

believed would win. Still, the number of Tibetans in “the Communist fold” was few<sup>80</sup>. Coverage of the PRC’s preparations became typical of reporting of events inside Tibet in general – inconsistent, reliant on sketchy, unconfirmed reports – but the American public had good reason to trust Lieberman’s article. As a veteran reporter who covered the Chinese Civil War and later became the *New York Times* science news editor, Lieberman wrote his article shortly after returning from a fellowship at the Council on Foreign Relations<sup>81</sup>. Sometimes the American public read pieces of good journalism, but sometimes not.

Tibet’s geographical isolation and technological underdevelopment lubricated the rumor mill that produced a flurry of reports on the PLA’s invasion. Looking back, the American press jumped the gun many times by mistaking all of the movement, activity, and even shooting along the border for the actual invasion that it perceived and reported as inevitable. By the time the *New York Times* reported that two PLA columns were marching toward Tibet from the east and northeast, there were skirmishes along the poorly-defined Sino-Tibetan border as the PLA probed Qamdo’s defenses<sup>82</sup>. The day after Americans learned that the PLA was moving on Tibet, they read that the Indian government discounted the report coming out of Hong Kong<sup>83</sup>; the Indian government had received no word of the impending invasion. In retrospect, no one should have put much confidence in the burst of reports alleging, then discounting, an invasion of Tibet. There were no Western reporters in Tibet and any news that Western reporters in Hong Kong, Kalimpong, New Delhi, Calcutta, or even Kashmir relayed to the US had to do so from locations hundreds of kilometers removed from the scene of action. Tibet had no modern roads, only a few radio

80 Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 34. Shakya describes Geta Rimpoche as opportunistic.

81 James Barron, “Henry Lieberman, a Times Editor, Dies at 78,” *NYT*, Mar. 16, 1995, B13.

82 “Chinese Communists Said to Move on Tibet,” *NYT*, Aug. 9, 1950, 19.

83 “Tibet Move Discounted,” *NYT*, Aug. 10, 1950, 7.

transmitters, and only one telegraph link to the outside world. Even though the Indian government maintained a (the) telegraph link to Lhasa, the Tibetan army laid in wait at Qamdo to defend the gateway into central Tibet. Qamdo was much farther away from Lhasa than the approximately seven hundred kilometer distance as the crow flies owing to the fact that no modern transportation network connected the two through daunting terrain. (Today, a 1,200 kilometer highway connects the two<sup>84</sup>.) News did not often travel fast in Tibet.

American press coverage of what would become known as the “Peaceful Liberation of Tibet” suffered for want of detail, confirmation, or even veracity because of geographic and technological limitations, but also due to the sources on which journalists had to rely. The Tibetan government did maintain radio contact with its army at Qamdo (British technicians Robert Ford and Reginald Fox operated the radio link), but even though Tibetan and PLA forces engaged in skirmishes just outside the Tibetan fortress town back in May, American reporters had very little to say about the hostilities other than they were receiving reports of clashes. During his coverage of the 1950 Tibetan delegation in June, Trumbull could only say that a correspondent for the New Delhi and Calcutta *Statesman* heard reports of skirmishes from travelers<sup>85</sup>, which was technically hearsay. In late September, the *New York Times* again reported violence in eastern Tibet, apparently relying on fleeing Tibetan travelers and officials for the information<sup>86</sup>. However, the article from Calcutta cited sources in distant Kalimpong, key Indian-Tibetan *entrepôt* near modern-day Bangladesh. That is, the newspaper still relied on third parties to do its reporting. By that time, Lhasa

84 Ford, *Captured in Tibet*, 18; An Caidan [安才旦], *Travel Guide to Tibet of China* [中国西藏旅游指南] (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press [五洲传播出版社], 2003), 159.

85 Robert Trumbull, “Tibet Offers Mao Negotiation Plan,” Jul. 30, 1950, 26.

86 “Chinese Red Dollar Circulating in Tibet,” *NYT*, Sep. 25, 1950.



had rejected Shakabpa's recommendation that it accept the PRC's terms in principal and his request to proceed to Beijing for further negotiations<sup>87</sup>.

An article in *Time* magazine published in November 1950 summarized the problems of reliable sources: "In the month that Tibet has been under Chinese Red attack, much of the news from the roof of the world has come from yak-drivers, muleteers and porters. Their hearsay and gossip, picked up at Kalimpong, India's gateway to Tibet, became grist for a notable rumor mill that had Lhasa lost, the Dalai Lama in flight, his army destroyed, his lamaseries in turmoil<sup>88</sup>." Without any journalists in Tibet, witnessing events firsthand, the American public only received news from Tibet by way of sources whose stories were often not verifiable. At first, Lieberman noticed that even the usually active CCP propaganda machine had little to say about the PRC's move into Tibet. The earliest Beijing radio announcement that PLA troops were "advancing toward Tibet" was not made in either the PRC's name or its Chairman's, which was atypical. Lieberman also noted that neither Beijing radio nor "Hong Kong's pro-Communist newspapers," *Da Gong Bao* and *Wen Hui Bao*, had anything to say about Tibet since that announcement<sup>89</sup>. For lack of the PRC's side of the story, journalists covering Tibet had to rely on what they could glean from traders, pilgrims, travelers, and Tibetans fleeing the conflict, as well as any diplomatic official willing to talk. It was not until October 31 that the Indian government finally officially confirmed the PLA's maneuver into Tibet. By way of its representative in Lhasa, the only accredited representative of a foreign nation in Tibet's capital, India confirmed that PLA troops were roughly 320 kilometers east of Lhasa occupying the strategically critical town of Lho dzong,

87 Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 32.

88 "A Sorry Business," *Time*, vol. 56 (Nov. 20, 1950), 28.

89 Henry R. Lieberman, "Reds Underplay Invasion," *NYT*, Oct. 28, 1950, 4.

among others, west of Qamdo. Trumbull quoted [British?] Foreign Office officials who said that the PLA could have been in Lhasa in two weeks if it force marched its troops<sup>90</sup>.

#### IV

The Tibetan appeal to the UN pushed an already active journalistic conversation of Tibet even further. Faced with an enemy it could not defeat on the battlefield, the Tibetan government turned to the UN in vain hope that foreign intervention would protect Tibet against the PRC. In the first week of November 1950, *Time* reported how rumors swirled that pro-Communist monks had overthrown the Dalai Lama in a *coup d'état* when the only radio transmitter based in Lhasa went silent. A week later, the transmitter came to life broadcasting that the mood in Tibet had deteriorated and *Time* speculated that the Dalai Lama and his regent had three options: (1) flee to India; (2) resist the PLA; (3) make a deal with the PRC<sup>91</sup>. Apparently, the Tibetan government believed that it still had a fourth option when it sent an appeal to Lake Success by way of Shakabpa in India. Whether or not Tibet could actually appeal to the UN became the Tibetan complaint of aggression's first hurdle. Even before the complaint reached the UN, Tibet's legalistic status as officially a "half-dependent state," "protectorate," or "suzerainty" reportedly bewildered the delegates and officials of the UN Secretariat. However, an unnamed *New York Times* reporter wrote that common consent was that "the details of the relationship between Tibet and China are by now lost in historical obscurity<sup>92</sup>." When the Tibetan complaint of aggression actually reached the UN on November 13, it was still unclear if the issue could even be considered. Tibet, after all, was not a member of the UN. The second subsection of the thirty-fifth article of the UN Charter

90 Robert Trumbull, "Indian Says Peiping Force is 200 Miles from Lhasa," *NYT*, Oct. 31, 1950, 1.

91 "Marx v. Buddha," *Time*, vol. 56 (Nov. 13, 1950), 29.

92 "Tibet Calls on U. N. to Mediate Strife," *NYT*, Nov. 11, 1950, 1, 3.

reads: “A state which is not a Member of the United Nations may bring to the attention of the Security Council or of the General Assembly any dispute to which it is a party if it accepts in advance, for the purposes of the dispute, the obligations of pacific settlement provided in the present Charter<sup>93</sup>.” The UN Secretariat had no background in Tibet’s status, was unable to determine whether or not Tibet constituted a “state,” and was at first only willing to informally distribute the Tibetan complaint of aggression to the UN’s member nations. Without a member nation to sponsor the Tibetan appeal, it would have been dead on arrival, categorized as just another communication from a non-governmental organization<sup>94</sup>. Without El Salvador, the American public would not have received deeper insight into the Tibet Question’s complications.

When El Salvador proposed forwarding the Tibet issue to the General Assembly without first going through the General Committee on November 15, the tiny nation in Central America not only surprised its fellow members at the UN, it also forced complicated details of the Tibet Question before world and American eyes. Unlike coverage of the 1950 Tibetan delegation, this time the press explicitly reported on how the parties involved were all reluctant to act because of questions regarding Tibet’s status either as an independent state, a Chinese dependency, or something of a *de facto* independent state in between. The *New York Times* published the entire text of the Tibetan complaint of Chinese aggression sent by the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan Cabinet, and the Tibetan National Assembly, the *Tsongdu*, the day after it arrived. The complaint appealed to the UN to intercede and restrain alleged Chinese Communist aggression while laying out the case that Tibet was racially, culturally,

93 “Charter of the United Nations, Chapter VI: Pacific Settlement of Disputes” The United Nations, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter6.shtml> (accessed Mar. 17, 2011).

94 Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 53.

geographically, and historically *not* a part of China, but a sovereign state<sup>95</sup>. However, a *New York Times* article published on the same day as the Tibetan appeal and a page turn away pointed out that no nation was then willing to raise Tibet's case before the Security Council. The article continued, saying that despite the Tibetan assertion that China had no special position in Tibet, most of the great powers disagreed and noted that the ROC, of course, claimed suzerainty over it<sup>96</sup>. El Salvador's demand that the General Assembly debate the issue without first going through the fourteen-member General Committee, which was normal procedure, thus came as a shock a day later. (There is no evidence that the US used El Salvador as a proxy for its interests. Rather, El Salvador sponsored the Tibetan appeal at Pope Pius XII's request<sup>97</sup>.)

No other nation wanted to touch the issue. As was becoming normal procedure of reporting about Tibet, news articles repeatedly stated that no other nation regarded it as a completely independent state. There were other complications. If the UN took up consideration of the Tibetan appeal, it "might make any practical dealing with Peiping almost impossible," according to *New York Times* reporter and later Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Abraham Michael "A. M." Rosenthal<sup>98</sup>. Contemporaneous to the Tibetan appeal was, of course, the Korean War, and Tibet seemed just a distraction from a more critical issue in the Far East. At this time, the UN was struggling with the issue of Chinese representation at

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95 "Text of Tibet's Complaint of Chinese Aggression," *NYT*, Nov. 14, 1950, 8.

96 "U. N. Gets Tibetan Plea," *NYT*, Nov. 14, 1950, 9.

97 Knaus, John K. *Orphans of the Cold War: America and the Tibetan Struggle for Survival* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 1999), 73.

98 Rosenthal also went on to become a pivotal, and temperamental, editor for the *New York Times*. Under his leadership, the newspaper won twenty-four Pulitzer Prizes and published the controversial Pentagon Papers in 1971. In 1995, the Dalai Lama presented him the International Campaign for Tibet's Light of Truth Award. Robert McFadden, "A. M. Rosenthal Is Dead at 84, Innovative Editor of The Times," *NYT*, May 11, 2006, A1, C14-C15; "Light of Truth Awards," International Campaign for Tibet, <http://www.savetibet.org/about-ict/light-truth-awards> (accessed Mar. 14, 2011).

Lake Success and resolving the Korean conflict certainly required Beijing's participation after it entered on the side of its Communist ally; there was simply little the UN could do for either Tibet or Korea as long as the PRC remained absent amongst its membership. In late November, "volunteers" from the PRC appeared in large numbers in northern Korea and the conflict threatened to expand beyond the peninsula. (Only later did the UN designate the PRC as an aggressor in Korea on February 1, 1951 with of vote of forty-four to seven and nine abstentions<sup>99</sup>.) Finally, although the US, the UK, and the UN in general all looked to India to lead on the Tibet matter, New Delhi was hesitant to do anything to jeopardize relations with Beijing. The idea of the UN intervening in what most of the world regarded as an internal affair also hit too close to home. In 1948, India objected to the UN taking up the controversy over India absorbing the princely state of Hyderabad by force when the Nizam of Hyderabad declined to join either India or Pakistan<sup>100</sup>.

It came as no surprise when the UN General committee voted to shelve discussion of Tibet indefinitely on November 24, the same day Americans went to their newsstands and read how MacArthur began a general offensive that he believed would end the Korean War<sup>101</sup>. The chief reason behind the decision stemmed from India's insistence that a peaceful resolution to the violence could yet be reached between the PRC and Tibet. Following Tibet's appeal to the UN, Rosenthal quoted India's delegate, Lieutenant General His Highness Maharaja Jam Sri Sir Digvijaysinhji Ranjitsinhji Jadeja, Maharaja Jam Sahib of Nawanagar, as stating, "In the Peiping Government's latest note to India the People's

99 Thomas J. Hamilton, "Division Still 44-7," *NYT*, Feb. 2, 1951, 1.

100 A. M. Rosenthal, "El Salvador Asks U.N. Tibet Debate," *NYT*, Nov. 16, 1950, 8.

101 "The Korean War," *NYT*, Nov. 24, 1950, 2. The PRC overtly intervened on Nov. 25, local time.

Republic of China said that it had not given up hope of a peaceful settlement<sup>102</sup>.” Although the UK wanted to support Tibet with a possible UN condemnation of the PRC’s actions, it hoped that the UN would not demand the PRC withdraw its forces and restore the Sino-Tibetan *status quo*, “which would at best be likely to lead to a resolution which China would defy and which could only be enforced by armed action which neither we, nor we assume India or anyone else, e.g., the United States, would be prepared to take. In the result the United Nations would lose prestige<sup>103</sup>.” Neither the UK nor India was confident about Tibet’s status amidst the international community, but the UK decided to follow India’s lead. The US was also sympathetic, but also deferred to India. Although the invasion of Tibet stung Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru – the *New York Times* published his weak rebuke of the PRC in the form a letter of “deep regret” over the invasion, to which Beijing responded harshly as outside interference in “the domestic problem of China” – he did not want to jeopardize relations with the PRC. A second note to Beijing stated that India hoped “that the Chinese government will still prefer the method of peaceful negotiation and settlement to a solution under duress and force<sup>104</sup>.”

The controversy in the UN over the Tibetan appeal combined with the invasion to put the Tibet Question in a new light on an international stage for American readers. Tibet truly became a newsworthy topic. As a result, longer, in-depth analysis of Tibet, its history, and the reasons behind the invasion emerged here and there in the American press to bring the American public up to speed. The *Foreign Policy Bulletin*, published by the Foreign Policy Association, a non-government organization dedicated to raising awareness of international

102 A. M. Rosenthal, “U. N. Group Shelves Discussion of Tibet,” *NYT*, Nov. 25, 1950, 3.

103 Cited in Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*, 717.

104 “Text of Indian and Red China Notes on Tibet Invasion,” *NYT*, Nov. 3, 1950, 6.

questions that affect the US, concluded that the PRC's action disturbed relations with India, but also stated, "Whether [the invasion] represents a compact between Moscow and Peiping to extend Communist domination throughout Asia or merely the attempt of Chinese leaders to consolidate and safeguard control over their national territory cannot as yet be determined." Its coverage of the roots of the PRC's decision to invade Tibet dove into Sino-Tibetan relations during the Qing dynasty (A. D. 1644-1911), the split between the rival Dalai and Panchen Lamas, and possible cleavage between Beijing and New Delhi<sup>105</sup>. A similar, but less academic, analysis appeared in the *New York Times* at roughly the same time with added emphasis on Tibetan culture, religion, polygamy and polyandry, and not a tiny bit of exoticism. The article concluded with:

In spite of [the Tibetan desire to be secluded], and whatever the outcome of the conflict in Asia, Tibet can no longer maintain complete seclusion. As the Red cloud gathers above the Himalayas, many minds in Tibet must now be concentrated on an integral precept of their faith which teaches them that Gyalwa Chamba (The Loving One) will, at the chosen time, emerge from the West to save mankind. Expectant Tibetan eyes seem to be looking to the West for a sign<sup>106</sup>.

Indeed, the Tibetan government expected help from abroad, but nothing from its efforts to solicit aid materialized anything more than headlines.

## V

While its appeal played out in the UN, the Tibetan government hedged its bets by pursuing its other two choices: flight to India and making a deal with the PRC. The Dalai Lama then emerged as a sort of celebrity when Americans began to watch his every move, starting with his assumption of power and flight to Yadong near the Indian-Tibetan border.

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105 Fred W. Riggs, "Invasion of Tibet Brings Chinese-Indian Discord," *Foreign Policy Bulletin*, vol. 30 (Nov. 10, 1950), 1-2.

106 Arthur Mathers, "Threat to 'The Land in the Sky'," *NYT*, Nov. 5, 1950, 174.

On November 17, 1950, the *New York Times* reported that the Dalai Lama was to assume full ruling powers a year-and-a-half before schedule in effort to end the political dissension within Tibetan government circles<sup>107</sup>. The Dalai Lama took control of his government after the Tibetan Cabinet and National Assembly accepted the two state oracles' prophecies that the safety of Tibet's people and religion rested with the then sixteen-year-old boy. The *New York Times* article showed remarkable insight into the political situation in Lhasa at the time, considering all of the aforementioned limitations that journalists faced reporting on events in Tibet. The article correctly mentioned the political tension within Lhasa that followed the PRC's military expedition into eastern Tibet. The threat of the PRC's invasion paralyzed the Tibetan government's ability to act because the government was still fractious and weakened from the Reting Rimpoche's conspiracy to overthrow the Dalai Lama's regent in 1947. Some within the government wanted to compromise with the PRC, others refused any consideration. The Dalai Lama's assumption of power was a victory for the political faction in Lhasa that resisted compromise on Tibet's *de facto* independence. This faction ordered Shakabpa to send an appeal for help to the UN<sup>108</sup>.

The *New York Times* reported on December 1 that the Dalai Lama was preparing to flee to India as the PLA in eastern Tibet sat poised to march on Lhasa. Even though the Tibetan government had been developing a secret plan to whisk the Dalai Lama to Yadong, approximately twenty-four kilometers away from Sikkim, the tell-tale signs leaked and wound-up printed in a newspaper. A *New York Times* article reported that a mule caravan carrying 5,200 pounds of gold belonging to the Tibetan government crossed into Sikkim

107 "Dalai Lama Takes Full Power Today," *NYT*, Nov. 17, 1950, 6.

108 Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*, 705-707. As the above *NYT* article points out, the Dalai Lama could have either been counted as sixteen or fifteen-years-old depending on the Chinese (and Tibetan) convention, or Western, respectively.



while some of the Dalai Lama's closest advisers made arrangements for accommodations in Kalimpong<sup>109</sup>. Six days after the fact, the *New York Times* printed its report that the Dalai Lama had fled for India on December 20. Later, the newspaper ran a story saying the Dalai Lama planned to install a new capital at Yadong where he and his government could observe the reported PLA offensive to Lhasa and Shigatse, which never occurred<sup>110</sup>. Although the Tibetan government received word from Shakabpa that the India government was willing to help the Dalai Lama should he need to cross the border, Trumbull reported from New Delhi news to the contrary: India was wary of granting sanctuary to the Dalai Lama and reportedly advised him to stay in Tibet until the threat to himself was more imminent<sup>111</sup>. The Dalai Lama's situation itself, not just Tibet's, became a focus of news media attention and the American public finally got word that the boy god-king was safe in Yadong when he arrived on January 2, 1951 led by "A procession of monks blowing long copper trumpets and and [sic] carrying sacred banners and incense burners...to the monastery situated on a hill overlooking the wide magnificent Lingmathang plain." The story of the boy god-king made for good press in part because it fit into Tibet's *Lost Horizon* romantic image<sup>112</sup>.

## VI

Signs of Sino-Tibetan cooperation dampened American interest in Tibet leading up to and following the Seventeen Point Agreement's signing. Two days before the UN General Committee killed the Tibetan appeal, a three man Tibetan delegation reportedly left Lhasa to

109 "Flight of Dalai Lama Held Being Prepared," *NYT*, Dec. 1, 1950, 5; Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*, 739.

110 "Dalai Lama Flees Tibet, Report Says," *NYT*, Dec. 26, 1950, 1; "Tibet Regime to Move," *NYT*, Dec. 28, 1950, 3; "Dalai Lama Reported Planning to Set Up New Tibetan Capital Close to the Border," *NYT*, Dec. 30, 1950, 2.

111 Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*, 739; Robert Trumbull, "Dalai Lama Urged to Defer His Flight," *NYT*, Dec. 31, 1950, 3; Goldstein writes that Skakabpa also told the Kashag that both the US and UK were willing to help, but he finds no evidence of such an offer.

112 "Dalai Lama Reaches Southern Tibet Area," *NYT*, Jan. 3, 1951, 2.

personally press Tibet's complaint of aggression. Even after the UN shelved discussion at India's suggestion, El Salvador continued its role as Tibet's champion and the Tibetan delegation to the UN continued its mission to Lake Success undaunted<sup>113</sup>. However, neither the American press nor the UN entertained interest of another Tibetan delegation in another appeal for foreign assistance. Although the Truman administration was gaining interest and reformulating its policy towards Tibet, the unknowing Tibetan government-*almost*-in-exile debated its next course of action. All that the American public knew of the tense discussions at Yadong was that the Dalai Lama reportedly directed his Cabinet to speed up efforts in the UN before he left for the Dungkar Monastery just a little ways up the Chumbi Valley<sup>114</sup>.

The Dalai Lama decided to remain in Tibet under pressure from members of his own government and the heads of the three largest and most powerful monasteries in Tibet: Sera, Drepung, and Ganden. Based on his diplomatic experience, Shakabpa also testified at Yadong that no foreign power would be willing to help either Tibet or the Dalai Lama in exile. Furthermore, the UN never invited the Tibetan delegation to come to Lake Success for a second appeal. In late January 1951, two Tibetan officials paid Ambassador Yuan a visit to inform him that the Tibetan government was ready and willing for serious talks. The Tibetan government appointed two officials among themselves at Yadong to go to Beijing. It also sent a telegram to Ngabo Ngawang Jigme, former governor of Kham and

113 "Tibetans Leave for U. N.," *NYT*, Nov. 22, 1950, 3; "U. N. Prodded on Tibetan Issue," Dec. 1, 1950, 12; "Tibetans in Appeal to U. N.," *NYT*, Dec. 2, 1950, 5.

114 "Lama to Speed U. N. Plea," *NYT*, Jan. 19, 1951, 4.

leader of the Tibetan army at Qamdo, whom the PRC captured and released, instructing him and two other officials at Qamdo to proceed to Beijing as well<sup>115</sup>.

The *New York Times* published the Tibetan delegation to the UN's claim at Kalimpong that Tibetans would fight a guerrilla war against the PRC indefinitely<sup>116</sup>, but it was not too long before a headline spelled out, "Dalai Lama Seeks Red China's Terms: Leaves Aides in Tibet Capital to Talk, Will Return There if Peiping is Reasonable"<sup>117</sup>." After reading the news in the first few weeks of January 1951, the American public might have concluded that months after the PLA demonstrated Tibet's military impotence, the Tibetan government was still trying to keep all of its options on the table. While the Dalai Lama remained a day's journey away from the Indian border, the Tibetan government was simultaneously dispatching a negotiating team to Beijing.

Coverage of the events leading up to and including the Seventeen Point Agreement's signing was very matter-of-fact. Journalists reported in early March that the Tibetan delegation to Beijing was only a formality because the Tibetan Government and the PRC had already come to an agreement. Under the agreement, Tibet would reportedly be to the PRC what the princely states were to India. In other words, Tibet would control its internal affairs while Beijing would control its defense and foreign affairs<sup>118</sup>. It therefore must have come as little surprise that the *New York Times* reported that Tibet accepted *suzerainty* under the PRC when Beijing radio reported that the PRC successfully achieved the peaceful liberation of Tibet. Lieberman reported that Beijing agreed to maintain Tibet's political and religious institutions and its officials, provided they cut "pro-imperialist and pro-

115 Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*, 758-759.

116 "Tibetan Predicts Fight," *NYT*, Dec. 25, 1950, 3.

117 "Dalai Lama Seeks Red China's Terms," *NYT*, Jan. 14, 1951, 1.

118 "Peace Terms Give Tibet 'Autonomy'," *NYT*, Mar. 6, 1951, 4.

Kuomintang” ties. Also under the Agreement, the Tibetans themselves would carry out “reforms.” Meanwhile, the Tibetan government agreed to restore the Panchen Lama to his position, integrate its army into the PLA, allow Beijing control of its foreign relations and national defense, and, of course, unite with China to expel imperialist influence<sup>119</sup>. From what Americans knew of Tibet’s status as an anomalous suzerainty under China from coverage of previous events, Lieberman’s audience might have believed that very little actually changed.

Although the *New York Times* reported that the Dalai Lama considered repudiating the Seventeen Point Agreement in July, that he asked for modification of terms in October, and only finally signed the treaty after a five month delay on October 27, neither the American press nor public had any idea of the drama amidst the Seventeen Point Agreement’s signing<sup>120</sup>. When the two Tibetan officials from Yadong met up with Ngabo at Qamdo, they gave him a letter authorizing him to negotiate with the PRC. The letter also told him to insist on Tibetan independence and the removal of PLA troops from Tibet. Ngabo thought these orders were ludicrous and never carried them out. Ngabo received further instructions that reiterated the two previous points when both sides agreed to hold discussions in Beijing, but the instructions also named him as the head representative and told him to refer all important points back to the Tibetan government for consultation. Ngabo did not actually possess the authority to sign any document without consulting the Tibetan government, but did so anyways because he feared what the PRC might do if he did

119 Henry R. Lieberman, “Lhasa Accepts Suzerainty of Peiping in a 17-Point Pact,” *NYT*, May 28, 1951, 1.

120 “Dalai Lama Said to Study Peiping Pact Repudiation,” *NYT*, Jul. 28, 1951, 4; “Tibet Delays Pact Ratification,” Oct. 14, 1951, 29; “Dalai Lama Signs Pact,” Oct. 28, 1951, 2.

not<sup>121</sup>. Although Ngabo had the seal of the governorship of Kham on his person, he and the rest of the delegation did not sign with any official seal, merely seals bearing their own names. (Tibetan nationalists later claimed that the PRC fashioned forged seals with which the delegates signed the treaty.) However, none of the delegates had the legal ability to sign the treaty and only affixed their proper names in no official capacity to the document<sup>122</sup>. The news of the Seventeen Point Agreement came as a shock to the Dalai Lama and his government<sup>123</sup>, but at that point, the PRC's "liberation" of Tibet became a *fait accompli*. Despite what Americans heard from the press, the PRC forced Tibet to accept its *sovereignty* as an integral part of China under the Seventeen Point Agreement's stipulations.

## VII

Significantly, US government involvement did not shape the American journalistic conversation of Tibet because neither American news reporters nor their readers were aware of the extent of US foreign policy toward Tibet. Everyday Americans were even unaware that the US sought to lend the Tibetan government in Lhasa material aid against their common enemy. Although the US government wanted to aid Tibet in its global war on Communism just prior to the Korean War's outbreak, neither the UK nor India shared that desire. The UK was not interested in encouraging Tibetan resistance to "Commie control" and advised the US to refrain from intervening publicly, saying "Tibetan collapse would have more serious effect in neighboring countries if [the] issue were played up in advance<sup>124</sup>." As inheritor of British interests in Tibet, India also wanted nothing to do with the US proposal to secretly extend Tibet arms and financing beyond the weapons India already sold to Tibet in

121 Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 62-64, 70-71.

122 Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951*, 770-772.

123 The Dalai Lama of Tibet, *My Land and My People* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1962), 88.

124 *FRUS, 1950, vol. VI, East Asia and the Pacific*, 365-366.

early 1950. In a possible case of precognition, Americans read in May 1950 that India denied a Soviet accusation that it secretly allowed the US to transport arms to Tibet<sup>125</sup>. Stuck in India, the Tibetan delegation made good use of its time by staying in contact with US Ambassador to India Loy Henderson beginning in June. The US State Department then concocted a plan to have the Tibetans approach New Delhi with a request to allow them to purchase additional arms without informing the Indians who would supply them. Shakabpa wanted American troops and planes, but the US, with limited military capability, was only willing to provide war material and finance. Ultimately, secret US-Tibet negotiations proved fruitless. India publicly recognized Tibet as a Chinese suzerainty and in the invasion of Tibet's immediate wake the Nepalese Ambassador to India informed Henderson that India was apparently "washing its hands of Tibet." Without India's participation, or at least acquiescence to allow the US and Tibet to transport arms across Indian soil, Henderson considered the question of aiding Tibet dead<sup>126</sup>. The US government's silence on American foreign policy toward Tibet was therefore no accident.

American interest in Tibet is remarkable compared to areas in Asia in which the US government was intimately involved. A world map published next to a *New York Times* article about the Western European response to the Korean War's outbreak contained the caption: "Communist Pressures As World Asks: What Next<sup>127</sup>?" Months after Acheson spoke of US policy in the Far East, Americans still wanted an answer and followed their government's involvement overseas. Americans were ignorant of the National Security

125 "India Denies Accord with U. S. over Tibet," *NYT*, May 16, 1950, 23. India actually sold Tibet weapons of its own volition. Nevertheless, Moscow was coincidentally correct, the US *was* conspiring to secretly arm Tibet against the PRC, but the accusation came a month too early to actually be true.

126 *FRUS, 1950, vol. VI, East Asia and the Pacific*, 376-378, 386-387, 425-426, 440-441, 493-495, 503, 540-541.

127 Harold Callender, "Far East Crisis Spurs Unity in West Europe," *NYT*, Jul. 9, 1950, E4.

Council's (NSC) conclusion on the eve of the Korean War in the original draft of NSC 68/1, called "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," that the US lacked the military capabilities to directly challenge the USSR politically and diplomatically. Without sufficient military capabilities reflecting a dramatic increase in defense spending, the NSC regarded the American policy of containment as a bluff<sup>128</sup>. Naturally, Americans watched UN "police work" in Korea, but beginning in 1947, Americans also witnessed the Truman administration shift from politically reforming occupied Japanese society, so that Japanese militarism would never again threaten the US, to economic reconstruction in order to build-up Japan as a bulwark against the USSR and the PRC. From the Korean War's outbreak to 1954, the US bought nearly three billion dollars of Japanese goods and services for the war effort<sup>129</sup>. Hansen W. Baldwin, Pulitzer Prize winning *New York Times* military reporter, outlined Japan's strategic position for the US in an article on June 25, 1950. The title read, "Ten Strategic Factors in Tokyo Treaty Talks," with the subtitle, "Japan Would Play an Important Part in Any Conflict with Russia<sup>130</sup>." Just as American public attention followed government involvement in Japan, so too did Americans follow the progression of government involvement in Southeast Asia, French Indo-China in particular. After Acheson publicly announced that the US would grant France and the Indo-China states of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia aid against Communism in Paris on May 8, 1950, a *New York Times* editorial article appeared the next day to illustrate French Indo-China's importance:

Indo-China occupies a critically strategic position. It borders Thailand, Burma and South China. It is a gateway to Malaya, as the Japanese

128 "A Report to the National Security Council – NSC 68,' April 12, 1950," 21-22; President's Secretary's Files; Truman Papers; Harry S. Truman Library & Museum.

129 Howard B. Schonberger, *Aftermath of War: Americans and the Remaking of Japan, 1945-1952* (Kent, OH: Kent University Press, 1989), 279-280.

130 Hanson W. Baldwin, "Ten Strategic Factors in Tokyo Treaty Talks," *NYT*, Jun. 25, 1950, 125.

demonstrated. It flanks the Philippines. It is a big arch in the bridge to Indonesia. If it falls to the Communist advance the whole of Southeast Asia will be in mortal peril....If Indo-China is to have a chance for eventual freedom, and if Southeast Asia is to be preserved, the Communist threat must be met<sup>131</sup>.

French Indo-China was strategically valuable not just for its natural resources, geographic location, and marketplace for Japanese or American goods, but also for the perceived effect its loss to Communism would have upon surrounding nations. It was a matter of dogma in Washington that if Indo-China succumbed to Communist expansion, its neighbors would subsequently fall like dominoes. 1950 marked the beginning of American government involvement in Indo-China<sup>132</sup> and it naturally drew the American public's attention. From Tokyo to Saigon, the Truman administration drove journalistic discussion of every nation with which the US was formally and strategically involved.

Although American public interest in Tibet developed independently of government involvement, that interest was codependent on Cold War conflict. During the 1950-1951 period, Tibet was just one, small part Americans' fear of the expanding Red Menace. In an article listing "Communist pressure points" around the world following the Korean War's outbreak and the invasion of Tibet, *New York Times* war correspondent Foster Hailey described Korea as the focus point of Communist aggression along the Cold War's 7,100 mile front line. Tibet was only a footnote in Hailey's article compared to Indo-China, Burma, Germany, and even Iran. Maps like the one included with the article were extremely typical of any discussion of Communist expansion and appeared regularly. Tibet

131 Harold Callender, "Acheson Sets Aim," *NYT*, May 9, 1950, 1; "The Indo-China Problem," *NYT*, May 9, 1950, 28.

132 George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 17.



was always listed as an object of potential or realized Communist pressure<sup>133</sup>, but the Cold War's focus was elsewhere. McCormick explained in another editorial that American interest in Tibet stemmed from its proximity to India. The rumors at the time "that the greedy vanguards of the new imperialism are concentrating on that strange and primitive state [Tibet]" made for good news and certainly caught American attention, but Tibet itself seemed unimportant next to larger, more pressing issues elsewhere<sup>134</sup>. Another editorial article published not long afterward touched on the legal question of Tibet's status, but overwhelmingly focused on Tibet's strategic location as a potential springboard for Communist movement into Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, and India<sup>135</sup>. A further editorial, entitled "The Curtain Falls in Tibet," came after news of the Seventeen Point Agreement's signing on May 28, 1951. The editorial began with "another bastion has been taken by communism; another vacuum filled by Communist expansionism" and then stated towards the end, "this is a defeat for the West, although a minor one. Its chief danger is that it brings the Communists right down on India's border....Another buffer has disappeared, and when one thinks of the danger on the other side to Iran – historically a buffer state linking India and the West – there is cause for anxiety over what has happened to Tibet<sup>136</sup>."

## VIII

Beginning in 1950, American journalists began to transform American interest in Tibet into sympathy with their news coverage. In Americans' imagination, Tibet was a victim of Communist aggression, plain and simple. The *Foreign Policy Bulletin's* assessment that the PRC might have been only seeking to consolidate control of its national

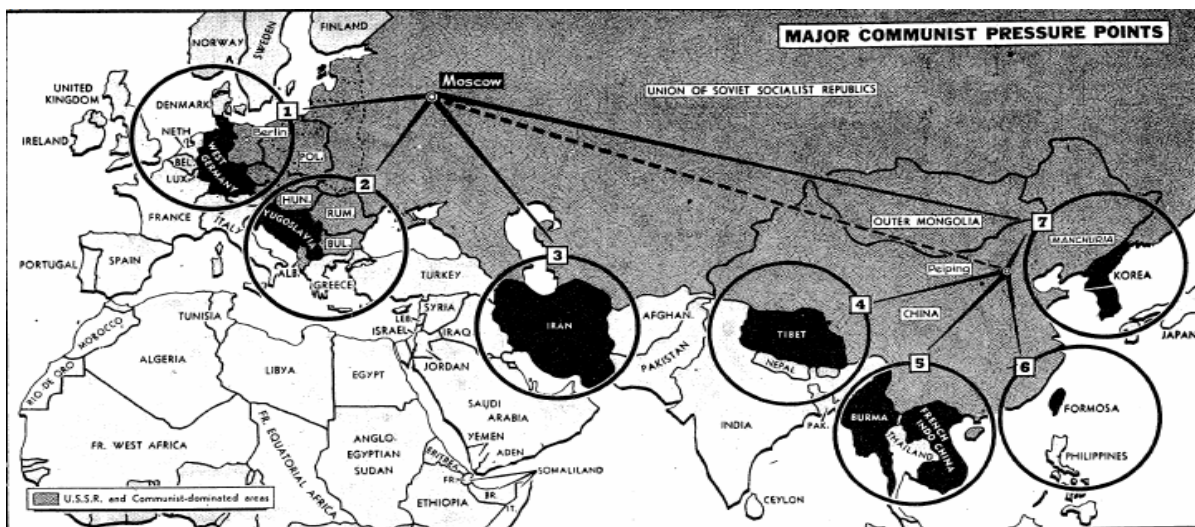
133 Foster Hailey, "Communist Pressure Points: Country-By-Country Survey," *NYT*, Sep. 24, 1950, E5.

134 Anne O'Hare McCormick, "New China Casts an Eye on the Lost Horizons," *NYT*, Oct. 28, 1950, 16.

135 "Sunset over Tibet," *NYT*, Nov. 8, 1950, 27.

136 "The Curtain Falls in Tibet," *NYT*, May 28, 1951, 18.

territory was an outlier in a crowd. Without US government input into the journalistic conversation of the Tibet Question or knowledge of government involvement, American news reporters overwhelmingly portrayed the invasion of Tibet as a compact between the PRC and USSR to extend Communist domination throughout Asia. From this journalistic conversation came the antecedents of American sympathy for the Tibetan nationalist principles that Tibet was an independent country before the PRC's invasion and that the PRC did not peacefully liberate Tibet, but illegally conquered it. American reporters had little knowledge of the diplomatic wranglings behind the scenes over Tibet's legal status and the legal nuances of the Tibet Question, which reportedly bewildered even the UN, evaporated in this context. Whether or not the English language rebroadcast of the PRC's offer of autonomy to the Dalai Lama and Tibetans was a plea for Beijing's case that Tibet was a part of China, to Americans the case was moot because they considered the PRC as an outgrowth of the USSR and an illegal Communist regime. Still, there was only so much space on a newspaper's front page and more pressing international hot spots in the Cold War choked journalistic discussion of the Tibet Question during this time.



Despite Russia's apparently conciliatory attitude at the United Nations General Assembly, she continues to exert pressure on the countries along her periphery. The pressure varies. On West Germany (1)

and Iran (3) it is exercised both from Moscow and internally. On Yugoslavia (2) the pressure is applied through the neighboring satellite states. In Southeast Asia and the Far East, Peiping is the

major source of Communist pressure on Tibet (4), Burma and Indo-China (5), and Formosa (6). The pressure on Korea (7), where war is under way, has been exerted both by Moscow and by Peiping.

### Part 3: Interlude, 1951-1954

From the time the PLA arrived in Lhasa in August 1951, the PRC military administration in Tibet and the Tibetan government coexisted in a tense relationship. After arm twisting on both sides, the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government finally formally ratified the Seventeen Point Agreement in October 1951, five months after the Tibetan delegation in Beijing had signed it<sup>137</sup>. Although the PLA authorities adhered to a strict code of behavior designed to avoid antagonizing Tibetans by respecting Tibetan culture and religion, while liberally paying for anything they needed, they found putting theory into practice difficult. The PLA's very presence provoked hostility as thousands of PLA troops strained Tibet's subsistence economy to the breaking point and inflated commodity prices. Even though the PRC administration left society in Tibet intact during the 1951-1954 period, threatening neither aristocratic nor monastic privilege, PRC authorities met determined Tibetan resistance to their policies, which economic difficulties exacerbated. The two acting prime ministers of the Tibetan government defied the PRC's integration of Tibet at every opportunity and became champions of anti-Chinese sentiment. When the PRC administration forced the Dalai Lama to ask the two acting prime ministers to resign in April 1952, the PRC momentarily quashed Tibetan resistance<sup>138</sup>. The PRC's integration of Tibet dovetailed with its campaign to modernize Tibet with roads, bridges, factories, power generation facilities, schools, clinics, cinemas, and so on. By the end of 1954, the PRC

137 Melvin C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, Vol. 2: The Calm before the Storm, 1951-1955*, (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 214-226.

138 Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 110-111.

secured its position in Tibet and began to gain Tibetan trust through its modernization efforts<sup>139</sup>.

Coverage of events in Tibet steadily dropped after the Seventeen Point Agreement's signing in American news media, reaching a nadir in 1953. However, the American public could still walk to their newsstands to keep abreast of developments behind the Bamboo Curtain. Through Lieberman's reporting of the establishment of a Tibetan Autonomous Region in Xikang back in December 1950, Americans became aware of Mao's adaptation of his own "new democracy" with Josef Stalin's approach to the "nationalities problem." Lieberman wrote that the Western Xikang Tibetan Autonomous Region's government was quite socially diverse, according to the PRC's official announcement, and included "seven abbots and Living Buddhas, nine local chieftains, an 'industrialist', and even a member of the local 'gentry'<sup>140</sup>." It was no accident that the Tibetan Autonomous Region in Western Xikang's government contained so many members of the Tibetan elite. Mao believed that he needed to slowly win-over the top of Tibetan society in order to successfully integrate the Tibetan population into a multi-ethnic state<sup>141</sup>. In 1953, the PRC scored a crucial victory when it concluded the 1953 Sino-Indian Trade Agreement by which the first non-Communist power recognized *Tibet as a part of China*, rather than a suzerainty. Despite the Bamboo Curtain and waning attention, the American press covered many aspects of the PRC's efforts to modernize and integrate Tibet.

139 Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 116, 119, 122. The PRC followed up the Sino-Indian pact with a similar trade agreement with Nepal in 1956.

140 Henry R. Lieberman, "West Sikang Regime Set Up," *NYT*, Dec. 26, 1950, 10.

141 Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, Vol. 2, 179.

## I

Interestingly, the American public suffered from no lack of information about road building in Tibet after the Seventeen Point Agreement's signing. The *New York Times* provided its audience with a steady stream of reports that followed the PRC's progress of linking Tibet to the rest of China with a modern transportation system. On April 6, 1951, the *New York Times* reported that the PRC had completed a motor road linking Yushu in Qinghai province to Qamdo<sup>142</sup>. Almost seven months after the PRC invaded Tibet, it finally had a road capable of bearing motorized traffic to the first major Tibetan town it "liberated." If the PRC was to have any chance of holding onto its gains in Tibet and supply the PLA in Lhasa and on the frontier, it desperately needed modern highways for a supply chain that would stretch hundreds, even thousands, of kilometers. Later in August, the *New York Times* reported that 100,000 Tibetans and [presumably Han] Chinese from Yunnan province were building a road to Lhasa from eastern Tibet. A very brief blurb subsequently reported that the PRC had announced its plan to build a road from Lhasa to Burang, the commercial center in western Tibet on the Tibetan-Indian-Nepalese border<sup>143</sup>. The need for good roads throughout Tibet's rugged terrain revealed itself over time: the PLA's presence in Tibet strained Tibet's ability to feed the extra thousands of troops beyond its means.

However, highways did not open for vehicle traffic all the way between Lhasa and Xikang and between Lhasa and Qinghai until 1954<sup>144</sup>, while another highway connecting Lhasa to Xinjiang remained under construction. The *New York Times* reported in October 1951 that the PRC planned to build two airfields outside of Lhasa, but did not give a reason

142 "Peiping Builds Road to Tibet," *NYT*, Apr. 6, 1950, 4.

143 "Reds Building Tibet Road," *NYT*, Aug. 6, 1951, 6; "New Tibet Highway Planned," *NYT*, Aug. 12, 1951, 34. The article uses the name "Taklakot" for Burang, also known as "Purang."

144 Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, Vol. 2, 418.

why the PRC was reportedly so interested in the airfield plans that Austrian engineer Peter Aufsnaiter designed while working for the Tibetan government<sup>145</sup>. Without anything more than mountain trails designed for yak or mule caravans, the PLA required food so badly that it looked to airlifting supplies. Trumbull reported in November that the Dalai Lama and his government approved airlifting food to Lhasa, but another report came out later in January 1951 that said strong winds prevented the first plane from bringing supplies from Qamdo to Lhasa. Meanwhile, PLA troops in Shigatse resorted to looting and eating food normally reserved for animal fodder<sup>146</sup>. Another reason the PRC needed motor roads emerged in the *New York Times*; the terrain in Tibet was so rough that PLA troops were wearing out their footwear. At the equivalent to \$6.72 a pair, shoemakers in Kalimpong reportedly received an order for ten thousand pairs of knee-length leather boots for PLA soldiers across the border<sup>147</sup>.

From airfields to motor roads, the American public kept itself up to date on the PRC's progress to modernize Tibet's transportation network. One brief blurb said, "Ancient Tibet for the first time is to have wheeled traffic, which has been barred for centuries. The Chinese Communists, who now run the country, are reported constructing carts to be drawn by animals or laborers to facilitate the distribution of rice and other supplies to their occupation troops<sup>148</sup>." Article after article in the *New York Times* described new PRC efforts to speed road construction or announcements of progress: "Thousands Building Road From Red China to Tibet" in November 1952, "Tibet Building Highway" in August 1953, "Red

145 "Tibet Air Efforts Noted," *NYT*, Oct. 2, 1951, 3.

146 Robert Trumbull, "China Food Airlift Accepted by Tibet," *NYT*, Nov. 8, 1951, 3; "Chinese Red Airlift to Lhasa is Balked," *NYT*, Jan. 11, 1952, 4.

147 "China's Reds Find Tibet is Rough on Footwear," *NYT*, Jan. 6, 1952, 2.

148 "Reds Alter Tibet Transport," *NYT*, Oct. 7, 1952, 2.

China Speeds Tibet Road” in January 1954, “China-Tibet Highway Pushed” in October 1954, and many more *ad nauseam*<sup>149</sup>. Almost all of the coverage of road building in Tibet consisted of very short blurbs, typically no more than a few dozen words. Most of the reports on the transportation difficulties that the PRC faced in Tibet were short and dry with an occasional oddity, such as a report that the PRC was sending 2,000 camels to Tibet “to ease the desperate transport problems of [the PRC’s] estimated 20,000 troops<sup>150</sup>.” Either it was a slow day for the *New York Times* editors and they just needed to fill page space, or, far more likely, any banal news about Tibet trumped banal news from anywhere else. Still, the American public definitely knew that the PRC was making progress in its efforts to physically integrate Tibet; on February 3, 1953, the *New York Times* reported that Beijing newspapers were reaching Lhasa in only ten days<sup>151</sup>.

More developed journalism covered the PRC’s other efforts to modernize and physically integrate Tibet. Americans apparently took issue with the PRC’s modernization efforts because developments kept appearing in print. Before the PRC’s head representative in Tibet, General Zhang Jingwu, even reached the Dalai Lama at Yadong on July 14, 1951, Senator Alexander Wiley, the senior Republican from Wisconsin, grilled Acheson before the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees absurdly stating that the Soviets were building airplanes only three hundred miles from New Delhi in Tibet<sup>152</sup>. No one was building airplanes in Tibet, but this was not the first time that Americans received word of

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149 “Thousands Building Road From Red China to Tibet,” *NYT*, Nov. 11, 1952, 10; “Tibet Building Highway,” *NYT*, Aug. 14, 1950, 20; “Red China Speeds Tibet Road,” *NYT*, Jan. 9, 1954, 4; “China-Tibet Highway Pushed,” *NYT*, Oct. 22, 1954, 6.

150 “Camels to Aid Reds in Tibet,” *NYT*, Jan. 10, 1953, 2.

151 “Chinese Building 3 Big Tibet Roads,” *NYT*, Feb. 3, 1953, 7.

152 “Wiley Tells Acheson Reds Build Airplanes in Tibet,” *NYT*, Jun. 8, 1951, 10; Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet Vol. 2*, 148.

dubious journalistic merit that the Soviets had designs in Tibet. Back in November 1950, Trumbull began a series of news articles on a Soviet plan – “obtained by extraordinary intelligence work, the details of which cannot be revealed” – of establishing air bases in western Tibet to extend Soviet domination<sup>153</sup>. Thomas helped break Trumbull’s story of the supposed Soviet plot in Tibet with his popular radio broadcasts<sup>154</sup>. *Newsweek* revealed that Trumbull’s extraordinary intelligence work amounted to paying a thousand dollars to an informant for the information<sup>155</sup>. (Trumbull later told Grunfeld that a “British Himalayan enthusiast and Tibetophile” approached him and sold the story for two thousand dollars.)

Although there was no hard evidence that the Soviets ever surveyed airfields or minerals in Tibet at the time<sup>156</sup>, Americans saw the Red Menace in the PRC’s modernization and integration plans. On June 13, 1951, the *New York Times* forwarded a *Xinhua* announcement that a mission composed of geologists, meteorologists, agriculturalists, language and social science specialists, and other scientists would be sent to “survey conditions preparatory to carrying out reforms.” The article concluded with “it seemed obvious from the composition of the mission that mineral and other resources would be explored and that its membership was sufficiently large and varied to encompass most major branches of the investigation, *including strategic military aspects*<sup>157</sup>.” An editorial in August 1952 took the news of railroad expansion in China’s northwest and the creation of three minority autonomous regions as a Soviet plot:

A second look at the situation and at the map is worth taking. Three “autonomous” regions were suggested, Tibet, Inner Mongolia and Sinkiang.

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153 “Soviet Maps Tibet Air Bases in Potential Threat to India,” *NYT*, Nov. 22, 1950, 1.

154 Grunfeld, *The Making of Modern Tibet*, 101.

155 “All the News,” *Newsweek*, vol. 56 (Dec. 4, 1950), 54.

156 Grunfeld, *The Making of Modern Tibet*, 101.

157 “Peiping Group Sent to Tibet for Study,” *NYT*, Jun. 13, 1951, 4. Emphasis added.



All three are contiguous with the Soviet Union and thus join in the rough category of other “autonomous” areas, such as the Trans-Khingan area...and the much earlier absorbed areas of Tannu Tuva and Outer Mongolia....The obvious inference is that the pattern will be followed and that Tibet, Sinkiang and eventually Inner Mongolia will play their part in the Soviet Union’s fragmentation of mainland China....It is now two years since Secretary Acheson declared that the Soviet Union’s policy on the Asiatic mainland was one of “attachment” of bordering areas. The currently reported developments are a part of that process of attachment.

Anything the PRC did to integrate and modernize Tibet seemed threatening to Americans because of the supposed Moscow-Beijing link and Tibet’s position overlooking India. Mao planned on using Tibet’s unexploited mineral wealth to develop the entire PRC<sup>158</sup>, reportedly with the help of Soviet technicians, engineers, and mining experts<sup>159</sup>. By the time the *New York Times* reported that Czech engineers were *en route* to Lhasa to help construct airstrips, roads, and bridges, as well as assist fifty Chinese scientists prospecting for minerals, a coal mine had already begun operation, which helped ease a fuel shortage<sup>160</sup>. Tibet contained (then and still does now) valuable mineral deposits, from gold and iron to borax and uranium<sup>161</sup>. Unfortunately for the PRC, it needed to allocate a lot of time and resources to extract Tibet’s mineral wealth right as the PRC was about to undergo the Great Leap Forward.

## II

Although it was relatively easy for American journalists to report on the PRC’s efforts to modernize Tibet, it was difficult for them to obtain a clear picture of Sino-Tibetan politics. Whereas the sources on which American journalists relied for information beyond the

158 Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, Vol. 2, 518.

159 “Modern Tibet Planned,” *NYT*, Apr. 2, 1952, 6.

160 “Coal Find in Tibet Reported,” *NYT*, Jan. 1, 1952, 6; “Czech Reds Reported in Tibet,” *NYT*, Feb. 22, 1955, 6.

161 M. G. Chitkara, *Toxic Tibet under Nuclear China* (New Delhi, India: APH Publishing, 1996), 43-44.

Bamboo Curtain could see the PRC's modernization campaign with their own eyes, and the PRC press published continuous updates thereof, PRC politics were always obscure. As a result, Americans during the early 1950's only caught a glimpse of the tensions between the PRC administration in Tibet and the Tibetans themselves. Accompanying the Dalai Lama from his retreat in Yadong was General Zhang Jingwu, head of the PRC's mission to Lhasa. Upon reaching Lhasa, Zhang set up his mission's headquarters and soon thereafter Americans learned PLA troops marched into Lhasa for the first time to insure the Seventeen Point Agreement's implementation<sup>162</sup>. However, the news that Zhang's mission in Lhasa at once initiated drastic economic reform that included confiscation of wealth from the Tibetan elite and redistribution of land was patently false<sup>163</sup>. In actuality, PLA troops were under strict orders not to antagonize the Tibetan population. Instead of seizing the Tibetan aristocratic and monastic elites' wealth, the PRC administration in Tibet showered aristocrats with silver dollars to pay for needed supplies and generously gave alms to monks and monasteries<sup>164</sup>. Trumbull implicitly corrected the report with his own article that said Zhang's alms-giving to every monk in each of the "three pillars of state" continued the tradition of imperial and then GMD patronage, while at the same time attempted to appease fighting monks who were reportedly not suffering their liberation well<sup>165</sup>.

Americans were not completely aware of the Tibetan opposition that Zhang faced upon accompanying the Dalai Lama back to Lhasa, but coverage of events in Tibet became gradually more alarming. The fighting monk situation became among the first indications

162 "Dalai Lama Reported On His Way to Lhasa," *NYT*, Jul. 23, 1951, 2; "Throng Hails Dalai Lama as He Returns to Lhasa," *NYT*, Aug. 18, 1951, 3; "Chinese Troops in Lhasa," *NYT*, Sep. 15, 1951, 2.

163 "Peiping Bids Tibet Confiscate Riches," *NYT*, Oct. 19, 1951, 3.

164 Shakya, *Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 94-95, 101.

165 Trumbull, "China Food Airlift Accepted by Tibet," Nov. 8, 1951, 3. Traditionally, Tibet's "three pillars of state" were Sera, Ganden, and Drepung monasteries.

of growing differences between the PRC administration and “independent Tibetans” when reports reached Kalimpong that the Chinese Communists demanded Sera, Drepung, and Ganden Monasteries surrender their arms and ammunition<sup>166</sup>. News that Zhang declared equality between Tibetan men and women followed after fighting monks reportedly assassinated a female cadre on the grounds of Jewel Park, where women were not allowed<sup>167</sup>. Food shortages and inflation tightened the tension between the two sides. Lhasa’s population doubled by the end of 1951, not including all of the thousands of draft animals that the PLA brought with it<sup>168</sup>. Americans learned that the situation was so bad that the PLA was forced to “borrow” forty thousand pounds of barley grain from the Kundeling Monastery in Lhasa as the Tibetan National Assembly convened ratify the Seventeen Point Agreement<sup>169</sup>.

All of the silver cash that the PRC administration used to purchase necessary food, fodder, and firewood for thousands of troops and animals pushed up the price of commodities. Americans knew of inflation in Tibet early on<sup>170</sup>, but not of its true extent. From the time the PLA arrived in Lhasa in August 1951 to November 1951, the price of barley grain (Tibetans’ staple food) more than doubled. The price nearly doubled again by April 1952<sup>171</sup>. It took time for the effects of the PLA’s presence to reach the American public, but in April 1952, Americans learned that the Tibetan government in Lhasa banned

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166 “China-Tibet Split Arises over Arms,” *NYT*, Oct. 23, 1951, 2.

167 “Tibet Women to get Equality with Men,” Oct. 29, 1951, 4. The Jewel Park, or *Norbulingka*, is the traditional summer palace of the Dalai Lama.

168 Shakya, *Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 93.

169 “Assembly of Tibet Reported Summoned,” *NYT*, Nov. 10, 1951, 3.

170 “Tibet Prices Held Rising,” *NYT*, Nov. 20, 1951, 8.

171 Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, Vol. 2, 254.

the production of alcohol from grain<sup>172</sup>. Later, in December 1953, the *New York Times* reported that the PRC administration banned the Tibetan New Year prayer festival citing near famine conditions<sup>173</sup>. The commodity shortage and resulting inflation was a public relations disaster for the PRC administration that was trying to implement Mao's plan of gradually winning hearts and minds.

### III

From underneath the apparent food shortage and inflation, resentment in Tibet against the PRC administration boiled over and onto the printed page. Although the American press completely missed the early controversy over the integration of Tibet's army into the PLA, which the Seventeen Point Agreement stipulated, and the simultaneous dispute over the Tibetans' insistence on continuing to fly their national flag, Americans caught glimpses of the development of the People's Association among the general Tibetan populace. For National Day, October 1, 1951, the PRC administration wanted to fly its flag on the Potala Palace and the Tibetan military headquarters, to which one of the two Tibetan acting prime ministers said, "How can you put two flags on one house? What kind of custom is that? How can two people sit on one chair? This is not possible, and it will never be possible<sup>174</sup>." Meanwhile, instead of relinquishing command of the Tibetan army to the PLA, the Tibetan government disbanded all but three regiments by March 1952 and many ex-soldiers lingered in Lhasa<sup>175</sup>. With no work and nothing to do, some of these soldiers came together with other Tibetans who were frustrated by their government's inability to resist the PRC

172 "Grain Shortage Cuts Tibet Beer," *NYT*, Apr. 4, 1952, 16.

173 "Tibetan Festival Banned," *NYT*, Dec. 27, 1953, 13.

174 Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, Vol. 2, 214-215.

175 Shakya, *Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 102. Shakya's date of March 1951 is a typo.

administration<sup>176</sup>. The Tibetan government was stuck between PRC authorities, who demanded that it take action against the growing anti-Chinese sentiment, and the coalescing of an anti-Chinese group, known variously as the People's Association, Assembly, or Representatives<sup>177</sup>.

The People's Association met openly, which explained how news of "Public agitation against the Chinese Communist occupation of Lhasa...[which] has risen to the point where the Tibetan government has been forced to make official representations to the Chinese authorities asking them to remove a large part of their garrison lest there be an uprising<sup>178</sup>," reached newsstands in April 1952. Two days later, the *New York Times* reported, "The situation in Lhasa, Tibet, is deteriorating rapidly under the food scarcity, with the dissatisfied Tibetan public holding daily meetings and anti-Chinese demonstrations in the city. Walls in Lhasa are plastered with posters demanding that the Chinese Communists withdraw from Tibet<sup>179</sup>." Popular resentment nearly caused the resumption of hostilities, but culminated with the two acting prime ministers' – whom the PRC authorities blamed and the People's Association championed – resignation and the People's Association's breakup. Still, Trumbull reported in December 1953 that an "anti-Communist people's party" reemerged from having been driven underground to challenge the PRC administration openly<sup>180</sup>. As tension between what Americans saw as a subjugated people and their Communist conquerors increased, so too did the coverage of events in Tibet, but initially very slowly.

176 Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, Vol. 2, 324.

177 Shakya, *Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 109-111; Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, Vol. 2, 314.

178 "Tibetans Aroused by Chinese Troops," *NYT*, Apr. 24, 1952, 2.

179 "Tibetan Protests Rise," *NYT*, Apr. 26, 1952, 2.

180 "Tibet Ruler Bars Red China Flag; An Anti-Communist Party Emerges," *NYT*, Dec. 1, 1953, D1.

After the Dalai Lama ratified the Seventeen Point Agreement and Zhang established the PRC's military administration in Tibet, the Tibet Question fell out of the American news cycle for several years. Between the ongoing Korean War and the 1952 presidential campaign between then retired US Army general, NATO commander, and President of Columbia University Dwight Eisenhower and Illinois governor Adlai Stevenson, there was little room for Tibet on the newspaper page after hostilities ceased. The news that came out of Tibet was relatively unexciting compared to news in August 1953 that the USSR had broken the US monopoly of the hydrogen bomb, for example. Nevertheless, American journalists kept their readers informed of the PRC's efforts to integrate and modernize Tibet, which alarmed Americans. In Americans' imagination, the progress of road building and other modernization efforts in Tibet signified the physical spread of Communism. Wiley's assertion that the USSR was building airplanes in Tibet or Trumbull's news story of secret Soviet airfields were as baseless as McCarthy's accusations during the contemporaneous Red Scare, but for the American public they rang true. Unbeknownst to Americans, they were witnessing Mao's gradualist Tibet policy in action, but news from Tibet attracted few big names from news organizations such as the *New York Times* except when the news was of simmering Sino-Tibetan tension.

#### **Part 4: Tibet Resurgent, 1954-1959**

Following the Seventeen Point Agreement's signing, violent resistance to PRC administration occurred only sporadically on a local level, mostly in the Tibetan provinces of Kham and Amdo. Widespread, violent rebellion broke out in spring 1956 when semi-nomadic Goloks massacred a PLA garrison in the town of Dzachuka in Amdo. That summer,

Khampas around the city and monastery of Litang followed suit. In both cases, the PLA responded with a punitive campaign by bombing towns and monasteries, and by “the classic acts of a rampaging and vengeful army<sup>181</sup>.” After Litang monastery’s remains stopped smoldering, a Khampa merchant named Gompo Tashi Andrugtsang resolved to unify the fractious Khampas against a common enemy. Gompo Tashi was not alone. He and other like-minded nationalists such as the Dalai Lama’s elder brothers, Taktser Rimpoche and Gyalo Thondup, organized groups and demonstrations, kept Tibet in the press, and secretly fed intelligence to foreign nations in hopes of securing support. In exile in India since 1952, Gyalo recruited an Indian Christian of Tibetan ancestry to change the Tibetan language magazine he irregularly published, *The Tibet Mirror*, into a weekly news source<sup>182</sup>.

Contemporaneous to resurgent Sino-Tibetan hostilities was the failed 1956 Hungarian Revolution. Nikita Khrushchev had succeeded Joseph Stalin following his death in 1953 as leader of the USSR and seemingly ushered-in a relaxation of Stalinist terror and policies. However, in October 1956 a spontaneous revolt erupted in Budapest as students protested against their Soviet-dominated government. Hungary was an independent nation, but a member of the Warsaw Pact, and the student demonstrations quickly turned into a popular uprising across the country. On October 24, Americans read that the Hungarian government had declared martial law in the capital and called on Soviet troops to put down rioters. The day before, soldiers opened fire on a crowd gathered in demonstration outside of the Budapest radio building, killing one. Meanwhile, demonstrators across the city waved Hungary’s red, white, and green national flag and displayed banners saying, “Do not stop

181 Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War*, 129.

182 *Ibid.*, 122-123. Taktser Rimpoche was also known as Thubten Jigme Norbu He was the Fourteenth Dalai Lama’s eldest brother. Gyalo Thondup is the Dalai Lama’s next oldest brother.

half way: Away with Stalinism,” “Independence and Freedom,” and so on<sup>183</sup>. In the following days, Soviet and Hungarian troops crushed the uprising, which unfolded before the American public’s eyes in black and white. *Time* magazine editors switched their choice of “Man of the Year” to the “Hungarian Freedom Fighter” at the last minute in January 1957<sup>184</sup>, but none of the daily coverage or numerous editorials praising Hungarian “martyrs” had any effect because neither the UN nor any other nation intervened by the failed uprising’s end in early November. One Hungarian refugee remarked bitterly, “The Russians, after all, were acting like Russians. But we expected more from the West than to be let down this way<sup>185</sup>.”

In the face of building Sino-Tibetan conflict, Tibet gradually rejoined the American news cycle during the 1954-1959 period. *Seven Years in Tibet’s* bestseller success indicated that Americans were still interested in Tibet’s *Lost Horizon* image, but not in the reality of the Dalai Lama’s apparent cooperation with Communism. Journalistic discussion of Tibet languished for lack of a news story that could capture the American public’s imagination until news of Tibetan rebellion hit newsstands. However, the quality of journalism remained largely unchanged and American journalists preferred to romanticize Khampa “tribesman” fighting against Communist “occupation” rather than discuss the Tibet Question. The 1956 Hungarian Revolution was a shocking episode in the midst of the post-Stalin “Khrushchev thaw,” and just as the invasion of Tibet paralleled the Korean War in Americans’ minds, the failed 1959 March Uprising conjured analogies in the press between events in Budapest and Lhasa. In the March Uprising’s wake, American journalists began

183 “Nagy is Renamed,” *NYT*, Oct. 24, 1956, 1; John MacCormac, “Budapest Police Fire on Throngs,” *NYT*, Oct. 24, 1956, 1, 10.

184 *Time*, vol. 69 (Jan. 7, 1957); John P. Matthews, *Explosion: The Hungarian Revolution of 1956* (New York, NY: Hippocrene Books, 2007), xxiii. A composite portrait of three armed Hungarians appeared on the cover.

185 Elie Abel, “Hungary Orders ‘Merciless’ Steps to Quell Revolt,” *NYT*, Nov. 11, 1956, 10.



to relinquish their role in shaping Americans' perception of the Tibet to such individuals as the Dalai Lama.

## I

In early 1954, *Seven Years in Tibet* became an American bestseller and the *New York Times* staff gave Heinrich Harrer's book rave reviews. Even though *New York Times* book critic Orville Prescott called Harrer's book a "spare" and "not very well written" chronicle, Harrer nevertheless won-over Prescott and many Americans with his account of his incredible adventures. After escaping from a British prison camp in India in 1944, Harrer and fellow Austrian Peter Aufschnaiter made their way into Tibet originally planning to reach friendly Japanese lines. Through inhospitable terrain during winter 1945, they reached Lhasa and found their way into a Lhasa noble's home. Harrer initially made a living as a gardener and English tutor, despite not having previous experience as a professional gardener and only a basic grasp of the English language himself. He also served as a translator for the Tibetan government, constructed dams, and even taught Tibetans how to ice skate, or "walking on knives." He ultimately left Tibet for safety as the Dalai Lama took up residence in Yadong<sup>186</sup>. Famous Indian writer Santha Rama Rau wrote another review for the *New York Times* that showered *Seven Years in Tibet* with praises:

Tibet is conventionally the land of romance, of mystery, of fantasy. Almost anything written about it is bound to have a special magic. Certainly, Heinrich Harrer's "Seven Years in Tibet" is no exception – in fact, it tells one of the grandest and most incredible adventure stories I have ever read, compounded of the infallibly exciting elements of mountain climbing, dangerous escapes, life in secret, forbidden Tibet and encounters with extraordinary people.

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186 Orville Prescott, "Books of the Times," *NYT*, Feb. 24, 1954, 23; Heinrich Harrer, *Seven Years in Tibet*, trans. Richard Graves (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1954).

One of extraordinary people Harrer met was the young Dalai Lama, whom Harrer tutored on a myriad of subjects. Rama Rau called the relationship between the god-king and the Austrian as reminiscent of *Anna and the King of Siam* (which Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II had recently adapted into a multiple Tony Award-winning hit musical, *The King and I*)<sup>187</sup>.

*Seven Years in Tibet* hit all of the right notes at exactly the right time and was the *New York Times* Book-of-the-Month Club's February pick. Thomas, who served as Tibet's unofficial ambassador to the US through his popular radio broadcasts, called *Seven Years in Tibet*, "A BOOK [sic] that will make the needle of your insomniagraph behave like a sky rocket...One of the *most unusual adventures of our time*...Don't miss Heinrich Harrer's seven years in the land the lost horizon"<sup>188</sup>. Although Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* monopolized the top of the *New York Times* best seller list for non-fiction throughout 1954, Harrer's tale of adventure stayed on the list for sixteen (non-consecutive) weeks, peaked at fifth place, and only fell off completely by the second week of July 1954<sup>189</sup>. The *New York Times* also selected *Seven Years in Tibet* and 299 others among approximately 10,000 books published in 1954 to recommend to its readers for Christmas<sup>190</sup>.

Clearly, Americans were still interested in Tibet, especially the Tibet of *Lost Horizon*. *Seven Years in Tibet* became a best seller precisely because of its depiction of Tibet, not for its literary merit. In Harrer, Tibet found another celebrity spokesperson who started to push

187 Santha Rama Rau, "Stranger in 'Paradise'," *NYT*, Feb. 28, 1954, BR3; The musical opened in 1951 and in 1952 won Tony Awards for Best Musical, Best Actress, Best Costumes, and Best Scenic Designer.

188 Display advertisement for *Seven Years in Tibet*, *NYT*, Mar. 25, 1954, 26. Emphasis in original. The advertisement cites Thomas, Rama Rau, and others' reviews.

189 "Best Seller List," *NYT*, Dec. 19, 1954, BR8; "Best Seller List," *NYT*, May 2, 1954, BR8; "Best Seller List," *NYT*, Jul. 11, 1954, BR8.

190 "A List of 300 Outstanding Books of the Year...A Christmas Guide for Reading and Giving," *NYT*, Dec. 5, 1954, BR56.

Tibet back into the journalistic conversation in 1954 to end the decline of news coverage. Rama Rau quoted Harrer as saying “My heartfelt wish is that this book [*Seven Years in Tibet*] may create some understanding for a people whose will to live in peace and freedom has won so little sympathy<sup>191</sup>.” Despite the book’s popularity and subject matter, Tibet’s comeback into the news cycle was a slow process. It is impossible to determine whether or not *Seven Years in Tibet* directly caused increased press coverage of events in Tibet, but its blockbuster success certainly corresponded with a gradual upturn.

Around the time *Seven Years in Tibet* fell off the Best Seller List, the *New York Times* reported that the Dalai and Panchen Lamas were about to leave Tibet for Beijing at the PRC’s invitation<sup>192</sup>. The Dalai Lama left Lhasa in July 1954 and arrived in Beijing in September. In Beijing, the Dalai Lama attended the Chinese National People’s Congress, which produced the PRC’s first constitution, met Mao, attended numerous banquets and meetings, and greeted Nehru as the first head of a major non-Communist state to visit the PRC. The PRC also made sure the Dalai Lama and members of his delegation saw the PRC’s industrial achievements, which suitably impressed the Tibetans<sup>193</sup>.

The amount of coverage of the Dalai Lama’s trip to Beijing and tour of various locations throughout China was not great. In fact, the *New York Times* waited to publish a feature story or any photograph of the two incarnation’s tour until the PRC announced the formation of the Preparatory Committee for establishing the Tibet Autonomous Region

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191 Santha Rama Rau, “Stranger in 'Paradise',” *NYT*, Feb. 28, 1954, BR3.

192 “Tibetan Rulers to Visit Peiping,” *NYT*, Jun. 27, 1954, 4; “Dalai Lama to Visit Peiping,” *NYT*, Jul. 13, 1954, 4.

193 Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 125-126; Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, Vol. 2, 486, 490-496, 503-505.

(PCTAR) in March 1955<sup>194</sup>. In contrast to such prior coverage of the Dalai Lama as his flight to Yadong, what Americans read about the Dalai Lama's journey to Beijing was quicker, more to the point, and sparser on details. Although the *New York Times* initially only reported that Tibetans urged him not to leave, tens of thousands turned out to watch the Dalai Lama's five hundred man delegation depart while some cried and nearly threw themselves in the Kyichu River as the nineteen-year-old incarnation crossed in his special coracle<sup>195</sup>. Just as in coverage of the Dalai Lama's flight to Yadong, there were physical and political limitations on what American reporters could see of events in Tibet, but American interest had clearly waned by this time. Americans were apparently eager for Harrer's depiction of Tibet that struck a *Lost Horizon* tone, filled with excitement and adventure, but not for the reality of Tibet and the Dalai Lama's ostensible cooperation with Communism.

Unlike coverage of the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet or the Dalai Lama's flirtation with exile, there was a Western journalist in Beijing on hand to report his observations: James Cameron from the *News Chronicle* of London. The *New York Times* published several of Cameron's dispatches, including one about how he accidentally managed to obtain the Dalai and Panchen Lamas' autographs, with the Dalai Lama's signature purposefully written first<sup>196</sup>. Even though Americans could see events transpiring in Beijing through a Western journalist's eyes, the American press put emphasis on other events occurring in Beijing over the Dalai Lama. Cameron's journalism provided an extraordinary opportunity for Americans to receive eyewitness testimony on the two most important Tibetans behind

194 "Peiping Promises Tibet 'Autonomy'," *NYT*, Mar. 13, 1955, 1.

195 Tenzin Gyatso [The Fourteenth Dalai Lama], *Freedom in Exile: The Autobiography of the Dalai Lama* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1990), 83; Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, Vol. 2*, 484-485.

196 James Cameron, "Red Delegations Flock to Peiping," *NYT*, Nov. 1, 1954, 1.

the Bamboo Curtain, but Cameron's own experience meeting the Dalai Lama was buried by his reporting on how much the PRC loved foreign delegations. Incidentally, Cameron also provided a means of historical corroboration when he sent his dispatch to the *New York Times* reporting Nehru's unexpected encounter with the Dalai Lama. While Nehru was in Beijing for Sino-Indian talks, he unexpectedly ran into the Dalai Lama in a situation Cameron described as "piquant," stating, "Mr. Nehru appeared to do a swift double-take, then embarked on a most animated conversation, to which the Dalai Lama replied with bemused nods." To the Dalai Lama's recollection, it was Nehru who was bemused and spoke only superficially<sup>197</sup>. Even though the PRC press made sure to waste no photo opportunity of Mao and the Dalai Lama together at the Tibetan New Year's banquet in Beijing, the *New York Times* only published a 132 word blurb on the event, without a photograph<sup>198</sup>. The American press had at its disposal an unprecedented view of the boy god-king, but made little use of it.

## II

Reports of Tibetan unrest trickled into the American newsstand beginning in 1954. A report from Taibei in August 1954 claimed that forty thousand Tibetan farmers had revolted some months earlier. The ROC Defense Ministry claimed the uprising occurred "in the rice-growing areas of southeastern Tibet, south of the capital city of Lhasa<sup>199</sup>." Of course, no rice grows on the Tibetan plateau south of Lhasa, and even though the economic situation in central Tibet generated resentment, it produced no peasant uprisings. However, there was a kernel of truth to the report in that it indicated the supposed revolt stemmed from

197 James Cameron, "Nehru and Mao Hold Crucial Peiping Talk," *NYT*, Oct. 20, 1954, 1; Tenzin Gyatso, *Freedom in Exile*, 93.

198 Tenzin Gyatso, *Freedom in Exile*, 97-98; "Mao Stresses Unity," *NYT*, Feb. 25, 1955, 2.

199 "Tibet Revolt Reported," *NYT*, Aug. 24, 1954, 7.

Tibetans protesting heavy taxes. It is likely that the ROC Defense Ministry discussed a real revolt, but located it incorrectly. Although the PRC implemented no “democratic reforms” in areas formerly under Lhasa’s control, ethnically Tibetan areas under direct PRC administration (i.e. in present day Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan) underwent democratic reforms at the same time as ethnically Han areas. In these ethnically Tibetan areas, hostilities broke out in 1952-1953 as the PRC attempted to alter Tibetan society. A Tibetan participant who escaped claimed that over eighty thousand rebels took part in the fighting in Kham and Amdo, including twelve thousand Nationalist army deserters<sup>200</sup>. The PRC defended its actions to quash the sporadic rebellions in areas it considered *not* part of Tibet as its legal right, but failed to realize that even though its argument was legally sound, Tibetans under or beyond direct PRC administration were still Tibetans<sup>201</sup>.

Reports in 1954 on Tibetan armed rebellion perfectly illustrated the American press’ inconsistency in representing what was geographically “Tibet.” In October 1954, the *New York Times* published a report on armed uprisings in Kham, which reportedly forced the PLA out of the area and the PRC to grant the area “full local autonomy.” The report centered on the area around Litang, but even though Litang was located in the Chinese province of Xikang – presently in Litang County, Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province – the *New York Times* report stated “Recent armed uprisings have forced Chinese Communist troops to evacuate part of *northeast Tibet*.” The report also added that the eastern half of Kham province, which corresponded to Xikang, was the “only practical

200 George N. Patterson, “China and Tibet: Background to the Revolt,” *The China Quarterly*, vol. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1960), 96.

201 Dawa Norbu, “The 1959 Tibetan Rebellion: An Interpretation,” *The China Quarterly*, vol. 77 (Mar. 1979), 81-84.

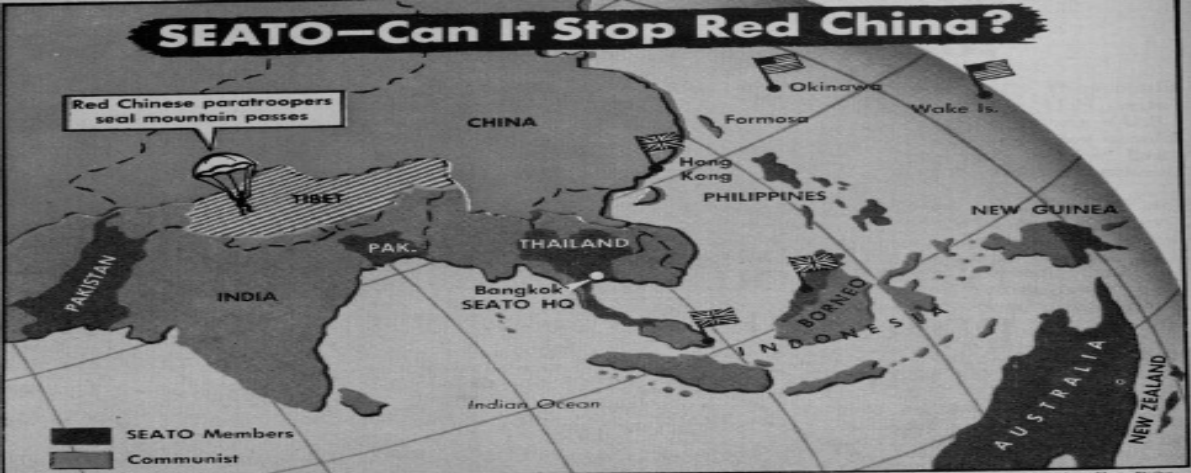
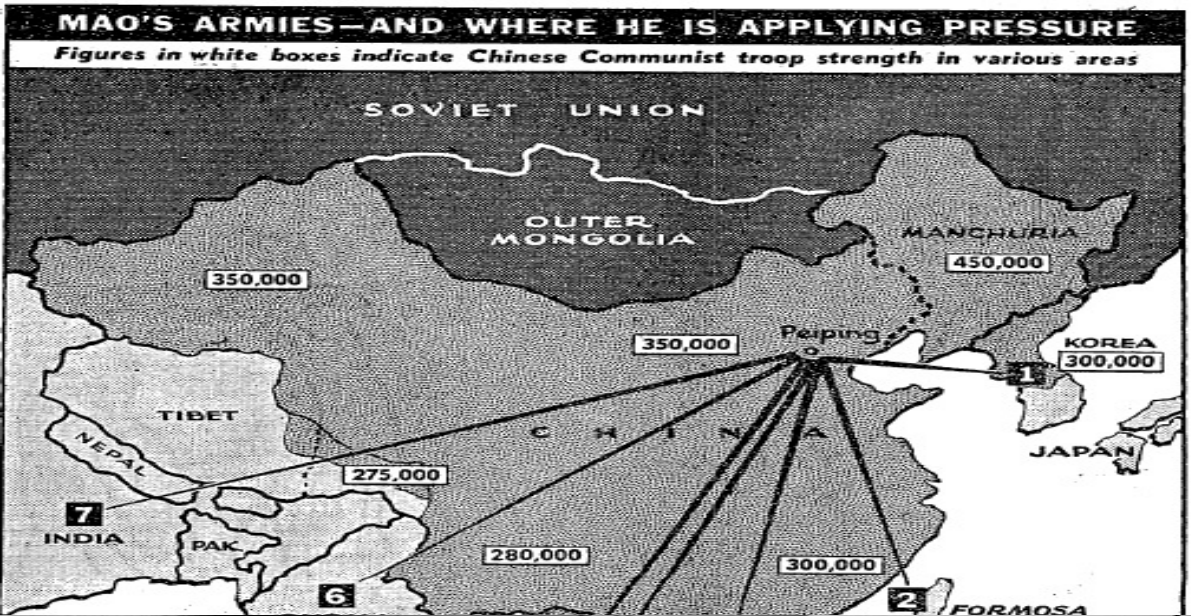
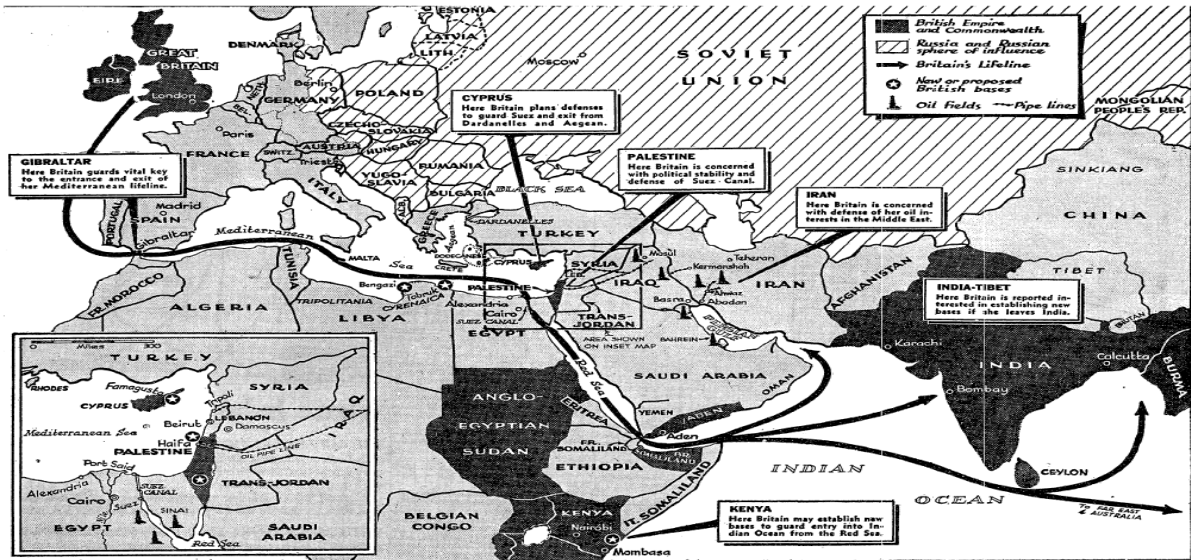
gateway to Tibet from China proper<sup>202</sup>.” To add to the confusion, the *New York Times* printed a report in October saying that leaders of the rebellion in Kham were being taken to Lhasa for trial, suggesting that all of Kham was “Tibet<sup>203</sup>” even though Khampas were spread out across multiple intra-political boundaries. However, maps that the American press sometimes printed next to articles concerning Tibet represented the region as roughly congruent to the entity now called the TAR. The maps found in the *New York Times* or *Newsweek* (below) were likely not meant to be drawn to precise scale, but the ethnically Tibetan provinces of Amdo and Kham were obviously missing from Tibet in the three maps from 1946, 1951, and 1959<sup>204</sup>, which were typical. Nevertheless, whenever American journalists reported on events in ethnically Tibetan areas, they generally referred to those areas as “Tibet” when Tibetans were involved. This also explained why there was so much confusion around the PLA’s invasion of Tibet during the 1950-1951 period; depending on one’s definition of “Tibet,” the start of the PLA’s invasion could have been placed much earlier than the first week of October 1950.

202 “Tibet Revolt Reported,” *NYT*, Oct. 21, 1954, 5. “Litang” was spelled “Litan” in the report, but it is also sometimes transliterated as “Lithang” elsewhere. Emphasis added.

203 “Reds Hold Tibet 'Rebels',” *NYT*, Sep. 22, 1954, 2.

204 [from top to bottom] Mallory Browne, “Britain Plans Her Global Defense,” *NYT*, Aug. 11, 1946, 77.; Hanson W. Baldwin, “If Mao Seeks Conquest He Has the Manpower,” *NYT*, Jan. 14, 1951, E4.; “A God Escapes,” *Newsweek*, vol. 53 (Apr. 13, 1959), 48.

AS BRITAIN EYES RUSSIA—SIX VITAL POINTS IN EMPIRE STRATEGY





## III

Sporadic, localized violence in ethnically Tibetan areas from 1951 to 1955 temporarily died down after rebels failed to attract foreign support and the PRC eased its reform policy<sup>205</sup>. However, in the beginning of 1956, atheist indoctrination, forced disarmament, heavy taxes, and rapid collectivization sparked renewed armed rebellion, starting in the Golok nomad region of Amdo. The rebellion in Amdo spread to eastern Kham when Khampa chieftains came together to organize, who then laid siege to a number of isolated PLA posts. The PLA inflamed the rebellion when it destroyed the Litang Monastery in response and the second wave of Tibetan rebellion spread like wildfire in ethnically Tibetan areas<sup>206</sup>. News of the 1955-1956 “Kangding Rebellion” first reached American newsstands in May 1956<sup>207</sup>. Whereas previous reports of violence attracted no big journalists’ names, Rosenthal reported from Katmandu that he received an account from one of the attendees of the Nepalese monarch’s coronation ceremony that rebels wiped out a six hundred man PLA garrison in eastern Tibet. Rosenthal noted that although there was no confirmation of the incident or other reports of unrest – Chinese Communists attending the coronation denied the report – Rosenthal also commented, “Although highly competent authorities in [Katmandu] say the reports are exaggerated, they believe the Chinese Communists have found Tibet...considerably more difficult to handle than they had

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205 Patterson, “China and Tibet: Background to the Revolt,” 96.

206 Kenneth Conboy & James Morrison, *The CIA's Secret War in Tibet* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 25; Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War*, 129.

207 Kangding, also known as Kanting or Dartsedo, is now the capital of Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. American Communist and writer/journalist Anna Louise Strong puts the beginning of the Kangding Rebellion in winter 1955 [Anna Louise Strong, *When Serfs Stood Up in Tibet* (Peking [Beijing]: New World Press, 1960), 65-66]; “Tibet Revolt Reported,” *NYT*, May 5, 1956, 2.

expected<sup>208</sup>.” In the same way that Sino-Tibetan conflict drove coverage of Tibet during from 1950 to 1951, reports of widespread rebellion once again launched Tibet into the forefront of the American news cycle beginning in 1956.

An editorial that followed Rosenthal’s report on the Nepalese royal coronation presented American alarm over Communist expansion from the Tibetan plateau, through the Himalayan nation, and into India. Political agitation in that region of the world caught news media attention and immediately launched a flurry of coverage on the unconfirmed reports of Tibetan unrest: “Tibet Rebel Regime Reported,” “Tibet Action Reported,” “Tibetan Unrest Retold,” and “Dalai Lama in Appeal” all in May<sup>209</sup>. There were more news articles on Tibetan hostilities in one month in 1956 than in 1954-1955. History repeated itself in that the American press forwarded reports out of Kalimpong, gleaned from “reliable” traders and travelers, without being able to verify their stories. Just as before and immediately after the PLA’s invasion, there were still no Western reporters in Tibet. Richard Hughes, a British journalist for *The Times of London* who visited mainland China during this time, wrote a piece for the *New York Times* in June 1957 that debated the value of having Western journalists in the PRC. In describing the working conditions of Western reporters, he commented:

A WESTERN [*sic*] correspondent in Communist China finds the surface contrast with the silent and implacable official hostility in other Communist countries at once disarming and encouraging. Beneath the surface of impeccable Chinese courtesy, there are inevitable handicaps and frustrations. He can, in general, travel and photograph where and what he likes...But he

208 A. M. Rosenthal, “Diplomats Hear of Tibet Unrest,” *NYT*, May 6, 1956, 20. Again, it is unclear from the report if the incident occurred in political or ethnographic Tibet while, again, a map shown with the article depicts Tibet as it exists today as the TAR.

209 “Tibet and Nepal,” *NYT*, May 9, 1956, 32; “Tibet Rebel Regime Reported,” *NYT*, May 13, 1956, 4; “Tibet Action Reported,” *NYT*, May 18, 1956, 3; “Tibetan Unrest Retold,” *NYT*, May 14, 1956, 4; “Dalai Lama in Appeal,” *NYT*, May 20, 1956, 29.

will find that requests for Army permission to visit Amoy, opposite Chiang Kai-shek's stronghold on Taiwan (Formosa), simply go unacknowledged, and that Tibet, open to him in theory, is in practice sealed off for lack of a commercial airline<sup>210</sup>."

The Bamboo Curtain made no difference to the American press covering events in Tibet because Tibet's geographic limitations, not political boundaries, sealed it off from outside eyes.

As in the case of reports of the PLA's invasion, the *New York Times* reported accounts of violence in Tibet and the Indian government refused to publicly acknowledge the rumors. The *New York Times* expressed the reason why India was reluctant: "Information on Tibet comes from Kalimpong in northeastern India, a town that lives on caravans and rumors<sup>211</sup>." Once again, Americans mostly received their news from American journalists as hearsay because journalists reported what other journalists heard from their sources. That is not to say that hearsay was never accurate. On June 30, 1956, the *New York Times* repeated the New Delhi newspaper *The Statesman's* accurate report: "The Tibetans' grievances were listed by [a *Statesman* correspondent] as heavy taxation, interference by the Chinese with religious indoctrination of Tibetan youth, 'crippling land reforms', and a general desire for the return of independence<sup>212</sup>." That is also not to say the quality of American journalism allowed Americans to receive a complete perspective of the Tibetan rebellion. For instance, the same *New York Times* article that forwarded the *Statesman's* journalism also mentioned that Tibetan rebels massacred an 850 man PLA garrison – Rosenthal heard from his source 600 – in northeast Tibet after the PRC instituted land reform. Americans waited until August 8, 1956 to hear confirmation from Beijing that there was *no* rebellion in Tibet, but there *was*

210 Richard Hughes, "What 'Dateline Peiping' Means," *NYT*, Jun. 23, 1957, 191.

211 "New Delhi Watchful on Tibet," *NYT*, Jul. 1, 1956, 4.

212 "Uprising in East Tibet Reported; Chinese Losses Termed Heavy," *NYT*, Jun. 30, 1956.

trouble in the Ganzi Autonomous Prefecture in western Sichuan<sup>213</sup>. In fact, Zhou later stated in December that he never heard of any revolt in Tibet, but commented, “If what you meant is the armed conflict between some people in Szechwan with Chinese armed forces, then that is over and entirely different<sup>214</sup>.” If confusion over unverifiable reports of rebellion was not bad enough, Zhou might have created confusion over the entire matter based on conflicting definitions on where Tibet was.

History repeated itself with regards to the quality of journalism on events from Tibet, but there was an added dimension. From exile in India, Gyalo led a group of Tibetan nationalists who organized to discuss Tibetan events, lobby Indian officials and members of Parliament, hold rallies and picnics, and publish news through the *Tibet Mirror*. In 1954, floods of historic proportions devastated the PRC, including Tibet. Although the PRC initially blacked-out news of the catastrophe within Tibet, the exiles organized themselves into the Tibetan Welfare Association and arranged for the *Statesman* to publish an article on the deadly flooding<sup>215</sup>. The *New York Times* followed the story as well, and after publishing a death toll of three hundred in Gyantse via the Associated Press in New Dehli, a *New York Times* article on the devastation in Shigatse mentioned Gyalo by name and his “flood relief committee<sup>216</sup>.” The *Statesman* published (then as it does now) out of major cities across India, including New Delhi, and from the time the *Tibet Mirror* became a weekly mouthpiece of Gyalo’s exile nationalist organization to 1959, American news organizations referenced the English-language *Statesman* frequently. Just who were the frequently-cited “reliable

213 “Peiping Concedes Rising near Tibet,” *NYT*, Aug. 8, 1956, 6. Ganzi Autonomous Prefecture is referred to as “Kantse” in the article, which is a Wade-Giles transliteration.

214 “Chou Discloses Revolt, Says China Smashed It,” *NYT*, Dec. 10, 1956, 17.

215 Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War*, 122-123.

216 “Tibet Toll is Put at 300,” *NYT*, Jul. 27, 1954, 3; “Collapses in Tibet Said to Bury 700,” *NYT*, Aug. 13, 1954, 4.

sources” in Kalimpong – Gyalo’s organization’s home base – who supplied American journalists was one tantalizing question, but just how much Tibetan exile news found its way into the American journalistic discussion by way of the *Statesman* is another.

#### IV

The Dalai and Panchen Lamas’ trip to India also produced headlines in the American press while Tibetan unrest continued into 1957, despite Zhou’s assertion to the contrary. Americans received confirmation on November 17, 1956 of earlier rumors that the two highest incarnations in Tibetan Buddhism would attend the final celebrations of the 2,500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of “Buddha’s Birthday,” or Buddha Jayanti. The PRC initially refused the two Lamas permission to go on pilgrimage at Indian invitation. One such excuse was that the weather in May 1956 (when Buddha Jayanti began that year) “will be too hot for the Dalai and Panchen Lamas<sup>217</sup>.” Although the *New York Times* published the announcement in a brief, forty-four word article<sup>218</sup>, the Dalai Lama’s visit quickly produced longer feature articles. Rosenthal, then a *New York Times* correspondent for South Asia, followed the Dalai Lama’s pilgrimage and the warm reception he received. His coverage squarely focused on the Dalai Lama over his younger counterpart, implicitly because of the Panchen Lama’s status as “Peiping’s favorite<sup>219</sup>.” Moreover, Rosenthal depicted the Dalai Lama as charming in spite of the political whirlwind around him as Zhou simultaneously paid India a diplomatic visit:

The city’s [New Delhi’s] attention was on the Communist Premier, and consequently a strangely moving little speech made today by another visitor passed almost unnoticed. While Mr. Chou was being feted, the Dalai Lama was speaking to a group of Buddhist scholars meeting here. This “living

217 “Keeping the Lamas Cool,” *Time*, vol. 67 (Apr. 30, 1956), 41.

218 “Dalai Lama May Travel,” *NYT*, Nov. 12, 1956, 3.; “Dalai Lama to Visit India,” *NYT*, Nov. 17, 1956, 11.

219 A. M. Rosenthal, “Indians to Greet the Dalai Lama,” *NYT*, Nov. 25, 1956, 9.

Buddha” of Tibet, a 21-year-old man of grace and smiling charm, made a prediction in his talk that “even in our present life, hatred, exploitation of one another and the ways and deeds of violence will disappear, and the time will come when all will live in friendship and love.”

Rosenthal more clearly juxtaposed Zhou as “captor” and the Dalai Lama as “captive” in a subsequent feature on Sino-Indian-Tibetan relations spread across five pages in the *New York Times* in January 1957. While Rosenthal carefully noted that many in Asia believed Zhou to be the hero and the Dalai Lama the villain, as representations of power and change, and oppression and exploitation, respectively, it was clear from his reporting that American sympathies laid with the “slight young man with a smile of tenderness who has been remote from the world and rules a land in high Asia only through the consent of his captors and the faith of his people<sup>220</sup>.” The Zhou-Dalai Lama dichotomy fit well in American sensibilities; Sulzberger later described Zhou as “the Pied Piper of Peiping” who used his “individual charm and political magic to lead an important number of non-Communist statesmen into a mental cavern similar to that reserved for children by the medieval tootler<sup>221</sup>.”

The Dalai Lama’s pilgrimage to India allowed Western journalists access to the person whom Americans most associated with Tibet. The Dalai Lama never gave interviews to Western reporters, but while he stayed in India the American press was able to show its audience a more personal perspective of the young god-king than ever before. Outside of the geographic limitations that hindered journalism, Tibet assumed a human face in print and in photographs from mainstream news media such as *The New York Times* and news magazines such as *Time*, its partner magazine *Life*, and *Newsweek*. *The New York Times* even published an account of how much he and the Panchen Lama apparently enjoyed

220 A. M. Rosenthal, “Chou and the Lama: An Asian Dream,” *NYT*, Jan. 13, 1957, SM5, 56, 58, 60, 62.

221 C. L. Sulzberger, “Asia and the Pied Piper of Peiping,” Apr. 1, 1957, 24.

riding an elephant, as well as a picture of the pair adjusting the settings on their newly-bought motion picture cameras<sup>222</sup>.



**PAUSE FOR ADJUSTMENT:** The Panchen Lama, left, and the Dalai Lama, nominal rulers of Tibet, adjust settings on their motion picture cameras near Bombay during recent tour of India. It was their first trip outside Tibet since Chinese Communists took over their country six years ago. One of first things they did was to buy cameras. Associated Press

Whereas the American press described the Panchen Lama, “who is Chinese trained and dominated<sup>223</sup>,” as a PRC puppet<sup>224</sup> (photograph below), the Dalai Lama, with his unassuming charm and talk of peace, friendship, and love even though he was the PRC’s “captive,” became a sympathetic figure. A report out of Taibei that said the Dalai Lama was under house arrest after his return to Lhasa in April reinforced the perception of the Dalai Lama as captive under Communist rule. Although the part about his housing having modern conveniences was true, the Dalai Lama was not forcefully confined, but only studying for his final monastic examinations in a new palace at Jewel Park<sup>225</sup>.

222 “Lamas Ride Elephant,” *NYT*, Dec. 3, 1956, 25; “Pause for Adjustment,” *NYT*, Dec. 26, 1956, 3.

223 “Down From the Heights,” *Newsweek*, vol. 48 (Dec. 10, 1956), 66.

224 “Living Buddhas On Indian Trip,” *Life*, vol. 41 (Dec. 17, 1956), 61.

225 “Dalai Lama Reported Confined,” *NYT*, May, 2, 1957, 6; Tenzin Gyatso, *Freedom in Exile*, 124-126.



DESCENDING TO INDIA. Dalai Lama rides lead horse down from high border pass in Sikkim. Riding

directly behind him is the Panchen Lama, whom Chinese Communists consider a more pliable puppet.

In contrast to the duo of incarnation's tour of China only a couple of years earlier, the Dalai Lama's pilgrimage to India received greater attention by far. From 1954 to 1955, there were a plethora of photographs of the Lamas with the upper echelons of PRC leadership (as the Dalai Lama himself recalled). However, the American press made little use of them. There was also at least one Western journalist in Beijing at the time who literally bumped into the Dalai Lama, but declined to ask the cleric for anything other than an autograph. During the Dalai Lama's trip to India, which the American press repeatedly billed as his own while leaving the Panchen Lama in the background, photographs and quotations of the Dalai Lama repeatedly wound-up in American newspapers and magazines, in contrast. Granted, Western journalists had better access to the Dalai Lama (they could take pictures of the Dalai Lama themselves, presumably), but that did not explain why the American press believed the Dalai Lama was suddenly worth a significant increase in page



space; the Dalai Lama was not the one driving American attention towards Tibet; Sino-Tibetan conflict was.

## V

Remarkably, in contrast to earlier American interest in the Tibet Question, or even the PRC's modernization campaign in Tibet, there was no discussion about Tibet's status in the American press' coverage of Tibet's political integration with the PRC. News reporters never stopped to wonder just what "autonomous" meant in its coverage of the political establishment of the TAR from 1955 to 1959. In March 1955, the *New York Times* reported the creation of the Preparatory Committee for the establishment of the Tibet Autonomous Region's (PCTAR) while the Dalai and Panchen Lamas were visiting Beijing. According to the *Xinhua* announcement on which the *New York Times* reported, the TAR "will have the status of a state organ subordinate to the Central State Council headed by Premier Chou En-lai" and the PCTAR's main task was to prepare for regional autonomy. This announcement also described two subcommittees for financial-economic and religious affairs, various departments to handle affairs ranging from health to animal husbandry, and many modernization projects, such as building a hydroelectric station in Lhasa<sup>226</sup>. However, absent from the news article was any analysis as to what this meant for Tibet *vis-à-vis* China or what "regional autonomy" meant within the PRC.

Almost a year later, Lieberman, still the *New York Times* correspondent in Hong Kong, wrote an article covering the PCTAR's formal inauguration in Lhasa in April 1956. Lieberman observed that the PRC gave no explanation for the long delay while also noting "Use of the term 'preparatory' indicated Tibet was not yet a full-fledged autonomous region

<sup>226</sup> "Peiping Promises Tibet 'Autonomy'," *NYT*, Mar. 13, 1955, 1, 3.

on a level with Sinkiang and Inner Mongolia<sup>227</sup>.” Although Lieberman gave his audience a critical clue to Tibet’s status within the PRC as minority nationality autonomous region, he did not discuss the political ramifications of Tibet’s transformation from some sort of suzerainty into a political entity akin to the Xinjiang Uyghur or Inner Mongolia Autonomous Regions. Again, Lieberman listed the various details of the PCTAR’s organization and reiterated Beijing’s Tibet policy of unity, progress, and greater development, but never discussed the question of “what does this mean for Tibet’s political status?” on behalf of his audience.

Also according to *Xinhua*’s initial announcement in 1955, the Dalai and Panchen Lamas’ followers had resolved their historic differences. Apparently, the *New York Times* was ignorant of this development’s political significance. Its news article correctly described the separate groups comprising the fifty-one member PCTAR: fifteen from the Tibetan government in Lhasa headed by the Dalai Lama, ten from Panchen Lama’s office (including the Panchen Lama), ten from the People’s Liberation Committee of Qamdo (PLCQ), five PRC authorities in Tibet, and eleven members of major sects and religious institutions. However, it failed to note that the PCTAR’s makeup effectively isolated the Tibetan government in Lhasa. The PCTAR divided Tibet’s administration among three Tibetan groups of representatives, forty-six in total, and five additional CCP cadres<sup>228</sup>.

Dividing Tibet into three main groups was not a simple “divide and conquer” strategy, but reflected deep political divisions within Tibet. Even before the contemporary Tenth Panchen Lama’s incarnation, the Dalai and Panchen Lamas’ offices had been in

227 Henry R. Lieberman, “Peiping Advances Tibet 'Autonomy',” *NYT*, Apr. 23, 1956, 8.

228 Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, Vol. 2, 500.

conflict for decades. The Panchen Lama's secular and religious office's inclusion into Tibet's regional government was a dramatic elevation that brought it nearly on par with the Tibetan government in Lhasa in terms of representatives within the PCTAR. As noted previously, Lhasa also never exercised firm control of eastern Tibet. After the PLA gained control of Qamdo and its surrounding area, the PRC established the PLCQ to manage the "liberated" area directly under PRC administration. Following the Seventeen Point Agreement's signing, the PRC did not return administration of the Qamdo region to Lhasa. Instead, a PLCQ composed of progressive Tibetans, religious figures from the area, formerly captured Tibetan officials, and members of the PLA remained a distinct unit until its incorporation into the PCTAR. Although the Dalai Lama was Chairman of the PCTAR, he and his traditional government were in the minority among PRC designated or influenced members in Tibet's new administration. The *New York Times* followed PCTAR developments, including its official inauguration in Lhasa almost a year later and enlargement to fifty-five members, but it missed how the PRC co-opted the Dalai Lama's government's authority into a government of its own making while the PRC actually made decisions above the Tibetan representatives' heads<sup>229</sup>.

Unbeknownst to either American news reporters or their audience, the PCTAR produced a great deal of tension behind the scenes. Americans had no idea because on the surface the Dalai Lama appeared to accept the PCTAR by participating in the Chinese National People's Congress during his stay in Beijing, by his outwardly charming appearance in India standing beside Zhou, and by the speech he gave at the PCTAR's second

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229 Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows*, 128-129; Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, Vol. 2, 208 [note].

anniversary, urging the TAR's establishment in April 1958<sup>230</sup>. The PCTAR's creation initially pleased the Dalai Lama and his government because they believed that they would again rule Tibet autonomously of Beijing. This was an improvement over the previous military administration on paper, but Sino-Tibetan tension erupted immediately over the Tibetan army's dissolution, the phasing out of Tibet's native currency, and the Panchen Lama's elevation of status<sup>231</sup>. In practice, the Dalai Lama and his government found the PCTAR and lose power over Tibet's government a hard pill to swallow. Ultimately, all of the PCTAR's members, decisions, and policies needed the PRC's approval, which meant that the PCTAR was not politically autonomous at all, but only an extension of Beijing's direct administration. The Dalai Lama later wrote bitterly of the PCTAR's inauguration in Lhasa in his second published autobiography:

Whilst on paper [PCTAR] promised to mark an important advance towards autonomy, the reality was very different. When Chen Yi announced the appointments, it turned out that of these fifty-one delegates (none of whom was [*sic*] elected), all but a handful owed their positions to the Chinese: they were allowed to keep their power and property so long as they did not voice opposition. In other words, it was all a sham<sup>232</sup>.

## VI

After the Dalai Lama's return to Lhasa, there were no continuing reports of violence with which American journalists could entertain their readers. In early 1957, the *New York Times* reported that the Dalai and Panchen Lama's appeals for acceptance of PRC administration quelled earlier uprisings against "occupation"<sup>233</sup>. However, the absence of news of open conflict throughout 1957 masked boiling Sino-Tibetan tension between

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230 "New Tibet Rule Urged: Chief Lamas Favor Autonomy within Red China," *NYT*, Apr. 23, 1958, 2.

231 Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet*, Vol. 2, 499-503.

232 Tenzin Gyatso, *Freedom in Exile*, 107. Chen Yi was Vice-Premier of the PRC at the time.

233 Greg McGregor, "Restudy of India by Peiping Seen," *NYT*, Jan. 20, 1957.

hardliners on both sides. Tibetan hardliners refused to accept changes towards integration with the PRC while their CCP counterparts pushed for socialist transformation of Tibetan society within Tibet proper<sup>234</sup>. There was little excitement for Americans to read about Tibet as American news reporters followed what was actually Mao's last attempt of a gradualist policy in Tibet after he postponed reforms for another six years. Throughout 1957, the *New York Times* reported that the PRC promised concessions to the Dalai Lama's government in Lhasa, withdrew troops and cadre from Tibet, closed Chinese schools, and relinquished authority back to Tibetans. An unnamed *New York Times* reporter wrote an article from Hong Kong calling the PRC's move a "tactical retreat" aimed at alleviating food shortages, popular resentment, and Indian fears of a threat across its border<sup>235</sup>. Even though Mao prevented socialist reforms within Tibet during the Great Leap Forward (the PRC's second five-year plan, 1958-1962), his gradualist policy collapsed when renewed rebellion broke out in Tibet and ignited American coverage of Tibet in summer 1958. Tibet might have once again fallen off of the American news cycle if it were not for another round of violence.

Although Zhou did not lie when he asserted that the PRC quelled the rebellion in ethnically Tibetan areas during Kangding Rebellion, he was not entirely correct either. Instead of crushing the spirit of rebellion for good, the PRC merely pushed the rebellion out of what it considered Chinese provinces and into Tibet. Tibetan refugees and rebels from Kham and Amdo streamed into Tibet to escape the violence. By 1958, fifteen thousand rebel and refugee families swamped Lhasa and exacerbated already existing, but still non-

234 Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon*, 54.

235 "Eased Red Grasp Hinted For Tibet," *NYT*, Apr. 28, 1957; "Red China To Cut Its Force in Tibet," *NYT*, Jun. 18, 1957, 4; "Red China Removing Its Aids From Tibet," *NYT*, Oct. 12, 1957, 2.

violent, Sino-Tibetan conflict. PRC authorities then made a crucial error by trying to deport the refugees, which frightened the masses of displaced Tibetans to an area south of Lhasa called Lhoka. There, the Tibetan armed resistance re-organized itself<sup>236</sup>. News of “Hungarian-type uprisings” in remote parts of China first emerged when Jiang declared that popular opposition to the PRC continued in Xinjiang, Tibet, Qinghai, and the border areas of Sichuan and Yunnan in spring 1958<sup>237</sup>. Americans might have read the Generalissimo’s announcement of continuous uprisings alongside his usual appeal for American aid against Communism incredulously, but in summer 1958, news of renewed Tibetan unrest hit American newsstands. The *New York Times* published reports of fighting and Tibetan refugees fleeing into Nepal and India while the PRC indefinitely postponed Nehru’s planned trip to Tibet<sup>238</sup>.

Through the dense fog of war, Tibet’s geographic boundaries, and the Bamboo Curtain, no concrete information emerged about a Tibetan guerrilla war or mass revolt. On August 26, 1958, the *New York Times* picked up how the PRC tacitly admitted the existence of imperialist and reactionary “subversive plots and splitting activities in Tibet” through a published version of the Dalai Lama’s speech in Lhasa a month before<sup>239</sup>, but official confirmation of renewed violence was lacking. All that Nehru would say about the situation in Tibet after he substituted a trip to Bhutan instead of Lhasa was that conditions were not “normal.” Journalists were so eager to report news about Tibetan rebellion that the article’s headline, “Nehru Indicates Unrest in Tibet,” was misleading; the article merely

236 Norbu, “The 1959 Tibetan Rebellion: An Interpretation,” 85.

237 “Chiang Reports Unrest in China,” *NYT*, May 26, 1958, 9.

238 “Nehru Cancels Visit to Tibet,” *NYT*, Jul., 28, 1958, 25; “Revolt Reported in Eastern Tibet,” *NYT*, Aug. 2, 1958, 4; “Tibetans Harass Reds,” *NYT*, Aug., 3, 1958, 67; “Tibetans Resist Red Chinese Rule,” *NYT*, Aug. 6, 1958, 5.

239 “Anti-Red Plotting in Tibet Reported,” *NYT*, Aug. 26, 1958, 3.

quoted Nehru as stating, “Obviously conditions in Tibet, *from such reports one gets*, are not fully normal<sup>240</sup>.” Nehru did not actually indicate anything, but only said that there were reportedly abnormal conditions in Tibet.

Once again, rumor and hearsay infiltrated American news media with little in the way of journalistic analysis. *Time* articulated the problem of reporting on the renewed unrest later in March 1959, “For years now, echoes have come across the lost horizon from remote Tibet that the Chinese Communists were having trouble digesting their 1950 conquest. Many of the reports of revolt and fighting came from refugees who in their excitement did not have all the facts straight, and when the details collapsed so did the reports<sup>241</sup>.” “Unconfirmed reports,” “Tibetan sources here in Katmandu,” “This information was furnished by a highly authoritative source that keeps in close touch with what goes on inside Tibet,” “a Nepalese businessman said here today,” and “according to reliable reports reaching here,” were the best with which the *New York Times* had to work before Elie Abel took over as the newspaper’s bureau chief in New Delhi.

Abel was previously the Belgrade bureau chief where he covered the 1956 Hungarian Uprising, for which he and the *New York Times* staff shared a 1958 Pulitzer Prize. His December 14, 1958 news article on the Tibetan rebellion was the first of that year to feature better analysis than previously brief statements on reported developments of the Tibetan unrest. The article was also the first to at least partially rely on officially confirmed information. Although Abel reported that that the Indian government affirmed that Khampa guerrillas were harassing the PRC’s vital transportation network in Tibet, he also clarified

240 “Nehru Indicates Unrest in Tibet,” *NYT*, Oct., 3, 1958, 2. Emphasis added.

241 “Leak on the Roof,” *Time*, vol. 73 (Mar. 16, 1959), 33.

“there is no support here for reports of a popular uprising in Tibet comparable to the 1956 revolt in Hungary. Such reports are considered in New Delhi to be products of wishful thinking by Chinese Nationalists<sup>242</sup>.” With Abel came better reporting about Tibetan unrest, but even the veteran bureau chief had little idea that Tibetan rebels by then effectively controlled swaths of territory in sparsely populated Tibet.

Despite Abel’s assessment, American journalists regularly compared Tibet with Hungary after news of the 1959 March Uprising broke toward the end of the month. Abel himself broke the story for the *New York Times* on March 21, reporting that “open warfare against the Chinese Communist overlords of Tibet has broken out in Lhasa<sup>243</sup>.” Shortly after Nehru described the violence within Tibet as “more a clash of wills... than a clash of arms” in attempt to play-down the rebellion, the Indian Foreign Ministry admitted that nearly all of Lhasa had joined the fighting<sup>244</sup>. In a piece entitled “Himalayan Hungary,” *Newsweek* compared the failed Tibetan March Uprising with the failed 1956 Hungarian Revolution in language reminiscent of the 1950-1951 period, “This, last week, was Red China’s answer to Tibet’s demand for independence. In its ruthlessness, it recalled Russia’s blood bath in Hungary. Eight years after the ‘peaceful liberation’ of one of the world’s most backward and unoffending countries, Communist ‘colonization’ (and the fiction of granting ‘local autonomy’) stood revealed for what it was – naked imperialism<sup>245</sup>.” The same day *Newsweek* published “Himalayan Hungary,” its competitor, *Time*, published its own article on the Uprising in much the same vein and beneath a photograph of the Dalai Lama was the

242 Elie Abel, “Guerrillas Fight Red Rule in Tibet,” *NYT*, Dec. 14, 1958, C2.

243 Elie Abel, “Tibetans Battle Chinese in Lhasa,” *NYT*, Mar. 21, 1959, 1.

244 “‘God’ Said No,” *Newsweek*, vol. 53 (Mar. 30, 1959), 50.

245 “Himalayan Hungary,” *Newsweek*, vol. 53 (Apr. 6, 1959), 56.



caption, “Hungary all over again<sup>246</sup>.” The next week came a political cartoon in *Newsweek* depicting Khrushchev pinning a medal entitled “Order of Hungary” onto a blood-spattered Mao<sup>247</sup>. Never before had Tibet captured the American imagination so vividly. Over and over again, journalists and figures like the anti-Communist labor leader George Meany denounced the PRC’s response to the March Uprising. As president of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), Meany himself called Tibet “the Hungary of Asia<sup>248</sup>.”

In the same way the invasion of Tibet paralleled the Korean War within the American consciousness, the March Uprising paralleled the Hungarian Revolution. The American press helped form this context with headlines screaming PRC atrocities and describing the violence as a bloodbath. On April 2, Abel reported that the PLA was forcing thousands of Tibetans into forced labor as PLA troops poured into Tibet to quell the continued, but hopeless, fighting. With a tinge of romanticism, Abel described the woefully outmatched Khampa rebels as no match “for a determined campaign of extermination<sup>249</sup>.” A day later, a former member of the Indian delegation to the UN, B. S. Gilani, wrote a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* claiming the Tibetan people were in danger of being wiped out not just in military conflict, but from starvation so long as the Indian-Tibetan border remained sealed. Gilani concluded with, “Let us be clear on Red China’s ultimate aim: It wants to colonize Tibet as it is doing surreptitiously in Sinkiang, Shensi and Mongolia. It has a pretext now to

246 “Call to Freedom,” *Time*, vol. 73 (Apr. 6, 1959), 25.

247 Cited in *Newsweek*, vol. 53 (Apr. 13, 1959), 46. Famous political cartoonist Leslie Illingworth drew the cartoon for the London *Daily Mail*, a British tabloid newspaper.

248 “Meany in Tibet Plea,” *NYT*, Apr. 3, 1959, 18.

249 Elie Abel, “Tibetans Seized For Forced Labor,” *NYT*, Apr. 2, 1959, 3.

wipe out the Tibetan people. Will the free world just stand by and watch<sup>250</sup>?” In article after article, editorial after editorial, the emotional response to the March Uprising allowed American journalists and their readers to draw the comparison between Hungary and Tibet, as well as endow Tibetans fighting for “freedom” in the face of “Communist aggression” with a romantic air of martyrdom. Sulzberger himself wrote an article entitled “The Free World’s Debt to the Khambas,” in which he stated toward the end, “We must thank the gallant Tibetans for this demonstration of freedom’s spark among the lesser known peoples in the remote Himalayan regions<sup>251</sup>.”

However, dissenting opinions did manage to join the journalistic discussion of Tibet. In response to Gilani’s accusation of colonization, a visiting professor at the University of Hartford and former ROC ambassador to the UN, Li Diezheng, wrote a letter of his own to the editor of the *New York Times* to refute the idea of colonization: “As a Nationalist Chinese I have not the least intention of defending Communist China’s policy in Tibet. But the migration of the Chinese people from the overpopulated coast to China’s ‘wild west’ provinces should by no means be regarded as colonization.” After pointing out that Shaanxi has been “Chinese” for centuries and that it once held the Tang dynasty capital of Xi’an, Li gave a legalist argument against the prevailing talk of Tibet as an independent state. Strangely, the self-proclaimed Nationalist Chinese even pointed to the Seventeen Point Agreement as evidence that Tibet was an autonomous part of China<sup>252</sup>. Another letter to the editor called the proclaimed similarities between Hungary and Tibet only superficial:

250 B. S. Gilani, “China’s Aims in Tibet: Plans for Colonization Declared Concern of Free World,” *NYT*, Apr. 3, 1959, 26. “Shensi” is the old postal name for “Shaanxi,” which does not follow the *pinyin* convention.

251 C. L. Sulzberger, “The Free World’s Debt to the Khambas,” Apr. 6, 1959, 26. “Khamba” is an alternate transliteration of “Khampa.”

252 Tieh-Tseng Li, “Status of Tibet: Historic Facts Said to Show It Is an Integral Part of China,” *NYT*, Apr. 13, 1959, 30. Li later defected to the PRC and became a high-ranking official.

In the first place, neither the United States nor any Western power has had any kind of commitment involving the independence of Tibet or the liberties of the Tibetan people. This is not true in the case of Hungary, where a number of international agreements, vaguely worded as they may have been, were disregarded, violated or at best unilaterally interpreted by one of the signatories, the Soviet Union. In the second place, neither the United States nor any Western power could reasonably regard Tibet as being within the sphere of Western strategic or historic interests, whereas the continued Russian occupation of Hungary represents the suppression of an ancient European nation whose historic and cultural connections have been European and Western<sup>253</sup>.

Although these forays into the Tibet Question appeared on the pages of the *New York Times*, the charged atmosphere surrounding the March Uprising prevented dispassionate journalistic discourse.

Tibet became an international relations disaster for the PRC in the March Uprising's fallout. On April 1, Dana Adams Schmidt of the *New York Times* wrote, "Indignation over Communist China's suppression of the Tibetan revolt is stirring the Asian neutralist world as Soviet suppression of Hungary's rebellion in 1956 stirred the Western world." Americans might not have read foreign newspapers, but articles such as Schmidt's reported foreign outrage. In his article, Schmidt cited an editorial from the Indian *Hindustan Times* entitled "The Rape of Tibet," which stated, "Let us hold our heads low. A small country on our border has paid the ultimate penalty for its temerity to aspire to independence. Tibet is dead." Schmidt also reported that the Burmese newspaper *The Nation* published an article under the headline "No Time for Neutrality" that asserted all Asians should condemn the PRC's suppression of the March Uprising as a "typically imperialist' suppression of autonomy<sup>254</sup>." Abounding examples of foreign indignation appeared in Schmidt's article and

253 John Lukacs, "Tibet's Suppression: Parallel Mention with Hungary is Criticized as Misleading," *NYT* Apr. 15, 1959.

254 Dana Adams Schmidt, "Asians Indignant at Reds in Tibet," *NYT*, Apr. 1, 1959, 3.

in American news stories in general for weeks afterward. Schmidt's colleague at the *New York Times*, Tillman Durdin, later quoted Malaysia's Minister of External Affairs as saying, "The Chinese Communists, in spite of all their professions of being peace-loving people who support the force of liberation have shown once again that they can be ruthless... As upholders of the United Nations Charter, we must deplore the failure to allow the Tibetan people to exercise self-determination<sup>255</sup>." Although Durdin was careful to note that the perception of anti-PRC sentiment in Asia was sometimes being inflated, and that no neutralist nation changed its policy toward the PRC as a result of Tibet, that did not stop one editorialist from hoping that Nehru and other neutralists would "learn the full lesson of Tibet" and snap out of their neutralism<sup>256</sup>.

## VII

Once again, US foreign policy toward Tibet did not shape journalistic conversation of Tibet. Although Acting Secretary of State Christian Herter immediately denounced the PRC's suppression of the March Uprising publicly, the *New York Times* article that carried Herter's statement noted that the State Department was weary of giving any impression that the US government instigated the revolt<sup>257</sup>. This was no accident. American journalists and their readers were unaware that there was some truth to the PRC's claim that "foreign imperialists" were to blame for the March Uprising and the Dalai Lama's subsequent exile in India. Since the mid-1950's, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had recruited and trained Tibetan agents for the purpose of bolstering the Tibetan armed resistance. The CIA's involvement in Tibet originated on a policy level directly from Secretary of State John

255 Tillman Durdin, "Asia Deeply Stirred by Tibet Repression," *NYT*, Apr. 19, 1959, E4.

256 "Mr. Nehru on Tibet," *NYT*, Apr. 29, 1959, 32.

257 "Herter Denounces Reds," *NYT*, Mar. 27, 1959, 4.

Foster Dulles and Under Secretary Herbert Hoover Jr. (Herter's predecessor). Significantly, the CIA's objective was not to achieve Tibet's independence, but only hinder and harass the PRC as part of the Eisenhower Administration's policy to challenge Communism at every opportunity other than costly overt military confrontation. The CIA made the decision to lend support to Tibetan rebels in summer 1956 before the limits of covert intervention were made clear that autumn in Hungary<sup>258</sup>. By 1959, the CIA airdropped over a half-million pounds of munitions and equipment to the growing Tibetan armed rebellion with CIA-trained agents' assistance<sup>259</sup>. Two of the Tibetan agents even made good use of their radio training when they intercepted the Dalai Lama's escape party and helped secure the Dalai Lama's asylum in India<sup>260</sup>, but the CIA was not directly responsible for the March Uprising.

However, other voices besides those of journalists' gradually began to take over discussion of the Tibet Question in the March Uprising's wake. As previously noted, American journalists gave up rational discussion of Tibet in favor of emotionally-charged rhetoric. Into this vacuum of debate over the Tibet Question stepped the Dalai Lama, whose escape from Lhasa into exile made him an international celebrity overnight. The PRC's manhunt for the twenty-five-year-old cleric made the first page of the *New York Times* and a "crush of correspondents from many parts of the world" awaited the Dalai Lama at Tezpur just across the Indian border in Assam<sup>261</sup>. Under the caption, "The Escape That Rocked the Reds," the Dalai Lama's bespectacled portrait graced the cover of *Time* magazine

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258 Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War*, 137-139.

259 Mikel Dunham, *Buddha's Warriors: The Story of the CIA-Backed Freedom Fighters, the Chinese Invasion, and the Ultimate Fall of Tibet* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2004), 263; Knaus, *Orphans of the Cold War*, 155.

260 Kenneth Conboy & James Morrison, *The CIA's Secret War in Tibet*, 91-93.

261 Elie Abel, "Peiping Paratroops Comb South Tibet for Dalai Lama," *NYT*, Mar. 31, 1959, 1, 4; Elie Abel, "Big Welcome is Waiting," *NYT*, Apr. 18, 1959, 4.

published a day after he arrived<sup>262</sup>. Earlier, the PRC proclaimed that the Dalai Lama had been kidnapped<sup>263</sup>, but the *New York Times* published the Dalai Lama's entire statement issued at Tezpur which asserted that he fled to India of his own free will. Moreover, the statement ventured into discussion of Tibet's historical status *vis-à-vis* China as well as recent developments *vis-à-vis* the PRC:

It has always been accepted that the Tibetan people are different from the Han people of China. There has always been a strong desire for independence on the part of the Tibetan people. Throughout history this has been asserted on numerous occasions. Sometimes the Chinese Government has imposed their suzerainty on Tibet, and at other times Tibet has functioned as an independent country. In any event, at all times, even when the suzerainty of China was imposed, Tibet remained autonomous in control of its internal affairs. In 1951, under pressure of the Chinese Government, a seventeen-point agreement was made between China and Tibet. In that agreement the suzerainty of China was accepted as there was no alternative left to the Tibetans.

But even in the agreement it was stated that Tibet would enjoy full autonomy. Though the control of external events was to be in the hands of the Chinese Government it was agreed that there would be no interference by the Chinese Government with the Tibetan religion and customs and her internal administration. In fact, after the occupation of Tibet by the Chinese armies, the Tibetan government did not enjoy any measure of autonomy, even in internal matters, and the Chinese Government exercised full powers in Tibetan affairs<sup>264</sup>.

Instead of American journalists, the Dalai Lama began to shape Americans' perception of Tibet. An editorial that appeared in the *New York Times* before the Dalai Lama officially reached refuge in India predicted that he would become a symbol of resistance against Communism<sup>265</sup>. Despite Nehru's attempt to prevent the Dalai Lama from assuming a political role, the Dalai Lama nevertheless became such a symbol. Another

262 *Time*, vol. 73 (Apr. 20, 1959).

263 "Text of the Red Chinese Announcement on Tibet," *NYT*, Mar. 29, 1959, 3.

264 "Text of Statement Issued by Dalai Lama," *NYT*, Apr. 19, 1959, 12. Text is reformatted.

265 "The Dalai Lama's Escape," *NYT*, Apr. 3, 1959, 26.

editorial illustrated the way his claims and statements, as well as reports of Communist atrocities, found relevance within Americans' conceptualization of "Red China":

The Dalai Lama stands by his statement that Peiping flagrantly violated its pledge to respect Tibetan autonomy and made unprovoked war on the people of his country. Reliable Indian sources report that Tibet has been turned into a vast prison camp, with monasteries damaged or destroyed by Communist artillery and whole villages wiped out, with no sign of life visible. Food supplies have been confiscated, military rule imposed and refugees harassed. This is the penalty an inoffensive people is paying for not wanting or readily accepting the communization of their country<sup>266</sup>.

Within the context of the Cold War and the prevailing parallel between Hungary and Tibet, the Dalai Lama later said in an interview published in the *Statesman* "that the people of Tibet were being subjected to 'unbearable tortures day and night'<sup>267</sup>." He then went on to publicly reiterate the Tibetan nationalist interpretation of the Tibet Question while simultaneously denouncing the PRC's actions disregarding Tibetan autonomy and "inhuman treatment" of the Tibetan people<sup>268</sup>. For Americans, the Dalai Lama was a living symbol of their perception of Communism, the PRC in particular, and the American public naturally gave the Dalai Lama the ability to shape their perception of Tibet.

## VIII

American interest in Tibet never completely diminished by 1954, but it was not until journalists had a compelling story with which they could capture their readers' attention that the Tibet Question re-entered journalistic discussion. As evidenced by the difference in popularity between Herrer's adventurous *Seven Years in Tibet* and the Dalai Lama's contemporary trip to Beijing, Americans were only willing to digest a certain perspective of Tibet. The image of fierce Khampas (who made up the bulk of the Tibetan armed

266 "The Death of a People," *NYT*, Apr. 24, 1959, 26.

267 "Dalai Lama Decries 'Torture' of Tibet," *NYT*, Jun. 7, 1959, 16.

268 "Dalai Lama's Statement," *NYT*, Jun. 21, 1959, 24.

resistance) rebelling against Communist “occupation” suited the American palette perfectly alongside the image of a young, charismatic Dalai Lama juxtaposed against an allegedly slimy, scheming Zhou Enlai. It was therefore no stretch for American journalists to link the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the 1959 March Uprising, despite vast legal-diplomatic differences. Abel and other’s assertion to the contrary – that Tibet was not “Mao’s Hungary<sup>269</sup>” – was a minority opinion.

Significantly, news coverage of the March Uprising had room to grow in the American press. Unlike the 1950-1951 period, the US was not overtly involved in a war overseas. The Korean War ended without a peace treaty in 1953 and the US government had yet to escalate its involvement in Vietnam. Furthermore, Khrushchev had yet to visit the US or bang his shoe on a table at the UN, Cuban counter-revolutionaries were still plotting the Bay of Pigs invasion, and the Cold War had not yet reached its apex during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, among other notable events. American journalists created an emotionally-charged atmosphere with their news coverage of Tibet as news of rebellion on the Tibetan plateau reached the outside world. Although they did not themselves bring the Tibet Question into their own journalistic discussions of the March Uprising, journalists gradually ceded that role to such prominent figures as the Dalai Lama.

### **Conclusion**

The way American journalists framed Tibet reduced journalistic conversation of the Tibet Question to an emotional and polemical dialectic during the 1950’s. Throughout the decade, fear of the “Red Menace” dominated international news and the Tibet Question did not enter the American news cycle until Tibet became embroiled in the Cold War. From the

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269 John Luckacs, “Tibet’s Suppression: Parallel Mention with Hungary is Criticized as Misleading.”



beginning of 1950 through the Seventeen Point Agreement's signing in May 1951, the issue of Tibet's status joined the "Communist versus Free World" dialectic. As the Korean War and the Red Scare raged, American journalists perpetuated the parallel between Korea and Tibet as examples of Communist expansionism and imperialism in Asia. Although Sino-Tibetan negotiations and the Tibetan government's appeal to the UN caused American reporters to address the Tibet Question, the majority of published news articles portrayed the PRC as a conqueror that illegally invaded Tibet. After all, American journalists and their readers drew a distinction between "China" and "Red China," the former having a legitimate interest in Tibet and the latter not. However, American journalists all but ignored even the ROC's claim of authority over Tibet. Tibetan nationalists and their sympathizers never had to convince the American public that Tibet was an independent nation before the PRC's invasion because American journalists did that job for them decades before contemporary Tibetan support organizations existed.

American journalists even framed the PRC's efforts to modernize and physically integrate Tibet in a Cold War context. Within this context, the PRC's visible or imagined efforts to modernize Tibet by building roads, airfields, electrical generation facilities, mines, clinics, and so on assumed a threatening nature to Americans. Although the current Dalai Lama (then and still does) appreciated the value of modernization for Tibetan society, American reporters had nothing good to say about any of it. Instead, American journalists reported how the "Red Chinese" as "occupiers" sought to use Tibet to further Communist plans of expansion into South and Southeast Asia. Even though the PLA had trouble feeding its border garrisons, Americans accepted phony reports and assertions that the USSR and the PRC were planning to use Tibet as a springboard to further Communist

“imperialism.” Tibet fell out of the American news cycle after the Seventeen Point Agreement’s signing ceased open hostilities, thereby removing Tibet from the Cold War’s front lines, but news from Tibet lingered in the background of journalistic conversation. The American perception of the PRC, which journalists helped to create during the interim years when Tibet was not front page news, as only using Tibet to further its own agenda partially explains the popular notion in American society today that the PRC has only ever been a parasite illegally occupying a land that is not its own.

The greater part of the explanation as to why everyday Americans readily accepted the Tibetan nationalist principle that the PRC has illegally occupied Tibet is the way journalists covered the 1959 March Uprising and previous Tibetan rebellion. The “David and Goliath” struggle between Tibetans fighting for “freedom” against the “new Communist imperialism” fit perfectly into American sensibilities. In a way, the PRC’s actions in suppressing the March Uprising justified American antipathy towards the Communist world, just as the 1956 Hungarian Revolution had a few years earlier. There was little room for rational discussion of the Tibet Question in the emotional and polemical journalistic atmosphere that followed. After all, if an American journalist did not take a position *against* the PRC, it would have been construed as a position *for* the PRC, anticipating the current nature of academic debate of the Tibet Question. The Cold War dialectic of “us versus them” precluded discussion of the Tibet Question at all because, in the American mindset, *of course* Tibetan nationalist principles were correct – Tibet was a *victim* of blatant Communist aggression.

Throughout the 1950’s, American journalists reported on news from Tibet in a way they believed their readers would like to hear it. In turn, Americans read the news from

Tibet that they wanted to hear. However, this was not a simple case of yellow journalism. The Cold War prevented unbiased journalistic discussion of international issues in general, but there were other significant factors with regards to coverage of Tibet. Without any Western journalists actually in Tibet, witnessing events firsthand, American news organizations and their own reporters had to rely on either third parties to do their reporting for them or unnamable sources who typically provided stories of unknown accuracy and bias. Critically, Kalimpong, center of Tibetan nationalists in exile throughout the 1950's, was the point of origin of many news articles by way of traders, pilgrims, refugees, and perhaps even Gyalo Thondup himself or his prototype Tibetan support organization. It is no wonder, then, why American journalists failed to consistently define Tibet's borders and created confusion between ethnographic and political Tibet. According to their Tibetan sources, "Tibet" was where ethnic Tibetans inhabited and American journalists were responsible for propagating that idea to their readers long before Tibetan support organizations existed.

During the 1950's, journalistic discussion of the Tibet Question had little to do with the actual historic debate over Tibet's status. Instead, American journalists crafted a version of the Tibet Question that was palatable for their readers. Not only did this version capture the American public's sympathy, but it has also proven remarkably durable since the Cold War's end. American journalists never introduced the finer points of the Tibetan interpretation of the Tibet Question to their audience, even if they understood or knew of it themselves. The Tibet Question therefore took on an entirely different meaning; it was never about Tibet's status with regards to China, it was about America's status with regards to China.

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