

# Tibetan Review

## ***The Fate of China***

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Many prophecies have announced that Tibet will one day regain its independence.

For example, the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram during a meeting with the Dalai Lama in 1973 had several times repeated: *'It is bound to come'*.

Today, the question is not if it will come or not, but when will it come and more importantly, how will it come?

In this context, we would like to quote from an audience we had with the Dalai Lama in Delhi in 1986. We still remember that the audience took place in the Ashoka Hotel in Delhi as the Dalai Lama was leaving the next day on a foreign trip.

We had asked him how he saw the future of Tibet and how Tibet could regain its independence in the future. He made several points which are I resume below:

- *The changes will come from China. We have to watch China.*
- *The people of China are very unhappy with their present political system.*
- *We, Tibetans have nothing to do, but to keep our faith and culture intact till events happen in China.*

We do not know if the Dalai Lama still hold the same views, but it is historical fact that the centrifugal forces within the so-called 'Chinese Empire' have always overtaken the centripetal forces and each time it resulted in the disintegration of the 'empire'. A similar process occurred in the Soviet Union a few years back and we can see today the sad results (corruption, anarchy, wars, etc...) of the collapse of the Soviet Empire. In this study we shall try to look at the 'external' signs to demonstrate

that the 'Chinese Empire' is slowly heading towards its disintegration. A few years back in one of his 10<sup>th</sup> March Statement's the Dalai Lama predicted that within five years or so, there would be a good chance for the Tibetans to return to Tibet. The five years passed and nothing happened.

Later when we asked the Dalai Lama about his prophecy, he laughed and said that he thought that China would like the former Soviet Union collapse over its own contradictions. For many reasons, it did not happen that way and China which has just celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its victorious revolution, appears very strong today. Some even believe that China may become the superpower No. 1 in the course of the next decade.

This is one view, but if one looks in detail at the problems and contradictions China is facing today, we can have good reasons to believe that the next decades will see the collapse of the last dynasty: the Communist regime and the probable disintegration of the 'Empire'. For the purpose of this study, we shall go through a few of the several dilemmas facing China at the dawn of the new century and we shall discuss some of 'knots' of the Chinese society:

### **The 5<sup>th</sup> Modernisation or Kill the Chicken to Warn the Monkeys**

In November 1981, the famous dissident Wei Jingsheng wrote to his family *"it became very clear that I was the chicken killed as a warning to the monkeys"*

He was explaining that for Deng Xiaoping the dissidents did not matter so much, his main worry was the Party officials and he wanted to make sure that they would not be bitten by the democratic virus. In the process a few chickens like Wei were sacrificed.

Deng had to make some examples 'to warn the monkeys'.

What the Party calls dissidence is not something new in Communist China. It was already there at the end of the Long March when the great revolutionary leaders lead by Mao Zedong settled in the caves of Yanan. At that time, a writer, Wang Shiwei, published a very strong attack on the

party leadership accusing the leaders of living a good life themselves even as they preached asceticism and egalitarianism. In his book *Wild Lilies* he described the leaders' life: dancing at night while the common people had a very hard life struggling against the Japanese invaders<sup>i</sup>. The party in Yanan as later in Beijing could not accept any dissident note nor even being told of any wrong.

At the end of the fifties, Mao began the campaign "Let the Hundred-Flowers Bloom, Let the Hundred Thoughts Flourish". It was a treacherous way to get rid of all the dissidents at once. In asking the intellectuals to criticize the Party, Mao was able to 'unmask' tens of thousands of 'intellectuals'. Once 'unmasked', they were 'rectified' during 'anti-rightist' campaigns.

For Mao, the strategist, the conclusion was: "In the beginning, people didn't know who the rightists were or what they looked like, and it was hard for us to explain, but now we can identify them clearly."

The Chinese revolution has been idealized by many western commentators and writers, but the fact remains, whoever ventured to say or write something not directly in line with the party ideology and theory had to be immediately 'rectified'.

In another words, the People's Party did not want to hear the voice of the people.

Mao with his 'rightist rectification campaign' and the 'thought reform' had warned the intellectuals and made them understand their place in the peasant and proletarian revolution.

The millions of Red Guards who demonstrated in 1966 on Tiananmen Square in front of the Great Helmsman were genuinely wanting a change. They saw in Mao's leadership the promise of a new socialist word, a hope for the future. They thought that after having got rid of the 'Four Olds', the power would be given to the people.

But Mao had other plans for the Red Guards and for China, he wanted to "bombard the headquarters" and eliminate his opponents in the party.

Once these were out of the way, Mao called the Liberation Army to control the young students; the People's Army against the people. This was no

democracy.

Zhou Enlai died in early January 1976.

Three months later, the citizens of Beijing decided to celebrate the Qing Ming festival of remembering the dead by honouring Zhou.

Spontaneously, large crowds began to deposit flowers on the Monument of Revolutionary Heroes on Tiananmen Square. When more and more joined the movement, it suddenly became a silent revolution.

On April 4, hundreds of thousands people assembled on Tiananmen Square. For Jiang Qing, the leader of the Gang of Four and wife of Mao and the other members of the Politburo the situation was untenable. The lights were switched off, the wreaths and flowers removed, and the army called in. The curtain fell on Tiananmen and the democratic expression of the Chinese people was once again suppressed.

But the death of a few chickens had still not scared all the poultry, less than three years later in December 1978, after the return of the 'ex-counterrevolutionary' Deng, a more articulate democratic movement emerged during the 'Beijing Spring' as it would be later known.

In Beijing a long stretch of wall, near the bus depot was soon named the 'Democracy Wall'. At the beginning, even the official press encouraged people to speak "Let the people say what they wish. The heavens will not fall.... If a person is to be punished for saying wrong things, no one will say what he thinks" wrote the People 's Daily in January 1979.

For some time the '*dizibaos*' or big character posters appeared on the wall. The favorite subjects were Mao, Jiang Qing and the Cultural Revolution. "The Cultural Revolution must be reassessed. Mao Zedong was 70% good and 30% bad" wrote someone on the Wall in November 1978.

The new slogans were speaking of democracy and freedom, something the Chinese people had never experienced but had been silently aspiring for. Some new stars soon emerged from the wall-writers and the brightest amongst them was Wei Jingsheng. His most famous pamphlet was the 'Fifth Modernisation'. Deng Xiaoping had proposed a new economic plan for 'Four Modernisations' when Wei wrote about Democracy as the fifth one. Soon he became a hero and the leader of the Beijing Spring.

However when he started personally attacking Emperor Deng, this could not be tolerated anymore by the Party.

His poster '*Democracy and new Despotism*' on March 29 was to be his last. A few days later he was arrested. It marked the end of the Beijing Spring.

The next time "dissidence" came on the front stage of Chinese politics was after the death of Hu Yaobang, the General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1989.

*"A real man died, puppets are surviving, can China still hope?"* said a *Dazibao* on Tiananmen a few days after the death of the leader. The same process as in 1976 happened for Hu who is said to have died of a heart attack while addressing the Politburo on the need of democratisation in China.

This led to the tragedy of Tiananmen square. It is not necessary to detail here the events which led Li Peng and old Deng Xiaoping to call the tanks to massacre the students on the night of June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1989.

The movement, born of some intellectual's mind and the Chinese people's heart had died one more time, but perhaps it was a rehearsal for a future greater demonstration. Deng later managed to make the students, the workers and the people forget their aspiration in providing them more food and nicer dresses to wear. For the past, twenty years, everyone is rushing towards the glory of becoming richer and richer, but it is doubtful that those who participated in the first people's revolutions in China, have forgotten the moments they lived at the Tiananmen Square or in Beida University. And the younger ones will be the ones envying the heroes of Tiananmen most and wanting one day to emulate their example and light the fire of democracy.

In 1998, the authorities were surprised when one dissident Wang Youcai decided to register the Chinese Democracy Party (CDP) as the first opposition party in China. Even though Beijing managed to block the registration of the Party, it proved a difficult task to control the branches of the CDP budding everywhere in China. It was eventually done and Wang and his colleagues were sentenced to heavy prison sentence.

The Communist Party has another uphill job: to control less organised opposition such as disgruntled workers, 'illegal' trade unions, social and environment activities and other less known groups.

Earlier this year, *Time Magazine* reported:

*More than 5,000 protests reportedly roiled the mainland last year, enough to tax even China's extensive security network...  
...The incidents are all the more unsettling precisely because they are so disconnected: the bombings--both far-flung (from Tibet to Fujian province) and mysterious (officials have blamed everything from jealousy to robbery)--point to a sense of random and widespread anger.*

Clearly Jiang has a serious problem on his hands and it is doubtful that he has any readymade solution.

### **The Limits of Development**

China is slowly discovering the limits of development. Like the other Asian tigers, the great boom which characterised the beginning of the 90's is slowing down with expected and unexpected consequences.

The problems are many and complicated. To change from a state-run economy to a capitalistic society is not an easy task. The former Soviet Union has experienced the problem and today anarchy is prevailing in Russia and most of its former satellites.

In China, the Party has kept a very strong grip on the political scene and so far disintegration has been avoided.

The factor which helped most to avoid (or postpone) the fall of the 'empire' is the fact that Deng Xiaoping was clever enough to first give food and other material necessities (and even luxurious) to his people, before thinking of opening up the political system.

The fact that the Party managed to remain in full control in Beijing has perhaps saved China from the same fate than Russia. But for how long is another question?

The main economic problem in China apart from the recycling of the state companies and its ominous consequence: the redundancy of the work

force involving tens of millions of people, is overproduction and under-consumption.

Recently (on August 18, 1999) the State Economic and Trade Commission (Chinese Ministry of Commerce) banned all new projects in the fields of consumer goods. This involves the production of a large number of consumer goods ranging from video compact disk players, microwave ovens, refrigerators, air conditioners, bicycles toothpaste, plastic bags, salt and liquor, etc...

Fear has entered the consumer's mind, the unemployment has reached such high level that the ordinary Chinese prefers to keep his money under his mattress than to spend it. As a result there is a deflationary process with producers trying to cut down their prices to sell their stocks.

With large scale unemployment comes another problem much more serious, namely, social unrest. The leaders in Beijing fear this more than anything else. They have all read enough of the history of China to know how Heaven withdraws its mandate to dynasties which are unable to feed their people.

After the recession touched Japan, South Korea and other Asian nations, the crisis looms large over China. The Beijing government is trying its best to avoid it. For example in August the EximBank of China had decided to ease its lending standards and had even accepted to give loans to state-owned enterprises operating with 'temporary losses'. It is a complete reversal of their policies in the process of following the Western market strategies.

The Bank is also trying to shift the development to Central and Western China which have been underdeveloped so far and where the government feels that perhaps new projects may generate employment and markets.

The new policy of the Bank shows that the Chinese government has shifted its priorities not to say its policies. In giving subsidies to export, in financing infrastructure through investments in less economically developed areas, Beijing shows that it has decided to play the card of safety and will try to maintain social stability at any cost.

The problem for China is that these new policies colludes with 'foreign' investor interests. Beijing can not have it both way.

### **Can China feed itself?**

Another problem with serious social and political consequences is the problem of food in China. The leaders in Beijing often declare: "China can feed itself in the next century". But the fact that the problem is so often discussed at the highest level of the Chinese hierarchy shows that there is a problem and the leadership is not sure to know where the solution lies and if there is a solution.

Indeed there is a problem and it has been pointed out in a remarkable book written by one of the foremost worlds expert in agriculture, the American, Lester Brown.

The book called *Who Will Feed China<sup>ii</sup>* was published by the *Worldwatch Environment Alert Series*, and it really created a great splash and forced even the Chinese leadership to rethink their agricultural strategies.

In an article in the *Beijing Review* in September 1996, a reporter admits: "*the fact that China's population of over 1.2 billion continues to grow by an annual rate of 10 millions have led some to ask if China can feed its people.*"

The problem is very simple, according again to the *Beijing Review* (Oct 1996), "*China's total coverage of cultivated land dropped by an astounding 21 millions hectares between 1958 and 1995, while the nation's population grew significantly from 660 millions to 1.2 billion during the same period.*"

The theory advanced by Lester Brown is the following: with the growth in population, which will stabilise only in 2045 at 1.6 billion and the growth of the industrial development, the arable lands reduce very fast while the needs of the population increase at the same time. The end result will be that China will have to import more and more grain from outside and the rise of the price of grain will increase on the world market till the point the planet will not be able to produce enough grain for the world demand and the poorer nations will not be able to buy their food.

Today everyone admits that 90 millions extra human beings on the planet every year collides with the limits that the planet can produce or give to her children.

China's problems immediately take greater proportions.

When the same problem affects a country of 1.2 billion people, it is very different from when it affects a smaller country. To give an example, if today the entire Chinese population would drink two extra bottles of beer it would require the entire grain production of Norway for one year to produce this additional beer.

A study has been made of three Asian countries which, like China were densely populated in agronomic terms before industrialisation.

The conversion of agricultural land into other uses (factories, residential areas, airports, roads, fly-overs, etc...) has provoked the loss of 52% of Japan's grain harvested areas, 46 of Korea's and 42% of Taiwan's.

China's development is not different from these three countries though it started later.

Another problem, which is a direct consequence of the rapid economic development, is that the affluence of the population has risen tremendously during the past two decades. When you become richer, the first thing that you change in your lifestyle, even before buying a flat or a vehicle is to improve your diet.

Traditionally Chinese people are not vegetarian as in India<sup>iii</sup>. The Chinese love to eat pork, eggs or chicken. To produce these animals more grain is needed and the problem of food grain becomes compounded.

The forces which were (and still are) at play in Japan, Korea and Taiwan are not different in China. Today these 3 above mentioned Asian countries are importing 71% of their food grain. How can China avoid facing the same problem?

One of the solutions is to increase the yield, but that is not an easy solution as China's yield is already quite high and to succeed where Japan failed is not an ordinary task.

Eighty per cent of the agricultural lands are irrigated land, one way to get a better production is to increase the irrigation. But the result is a

depletion of the aquifers. This problem is even getting worse with the use of traditionally irrigation water for industrial use.

Lester Brown concludes his study in quoting again the case of the Asian industrialised countries Japan, Korea and Thailand which in spite of the best conditions have become grain importers. Lester Brown's conclusion is that:

*In an integrated world economy, China's rising food prices will become the world's rising food prices. China's land scarcity will become everyone's land scarcity. And water scarcity in China will affect the entire world. China's dependence on massive imports, like the collapse of the world's fisheries, will be a wake-up call that we are colliding with the earth's capacity to feed us. It could well lead us to redefine national security away from military preparedness and toward maintaining adequate food supplies.*

A small mercy is the fact that for the past two years the growth of China's development has reduced to a more manageable 7/8% yearly.

But will it be sufficient to reduce the import of grain?

### **Military: What to do with the PLA?**

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has been one of the pillars of the Chinese Revolution. Recruited by Mao Zedong and his commanders during the Long March, the PLA has traditionally been a peasant army and it is always to the PLA that the Communist regime in Beijing has turned in its moments of crisis. It happened after the mad fury of the first years of the Great proletarian Cultural Revolution in the late sixties and more recently, during the student Revolution on the Tiananmen Square in 1989.

Traditionally the PLA has always been dominated by the Party and old soldiers of the Long March have been till recently the Chairmen of the Central Military Commission. It is only with the take over of President Jiang Zemin that a non-army man has become for a first time the supreme commander of the Chinese forces.

One question has propped up time and again in the history of China: how to control the army and prevent the local commanders from creating their own small fiefdoms and to become new warlords?

This has been the plague of China for centuries and it is only the Communist regime of Mao which has for the first time in more than one century managed to control the local army commanders and keep a centralised command. But the tendencies of 'local commanders' taking over their respective provinces has always remained.

In the spring of 1950, Mao and his colleagues had already thought to decommission a few millions troops, as the state was not able to feed these soldiers. But suddenly the Korean war began and the PLA had an 'task' for a few years.

After the Korea War, the problem remained unsolved. The economic 'liberalisation' undertaken by Deng Xiaoping at the end of the seventies turned everyone in China to wild capitalism: 'to become rich is glorious' the new emperor had said.

No white cats, no black cats, no red cats anymore, all the cats had to become rich!

With Deng, business in the PLA took a new dimension, a new diversion we should say. The PLA became the largest business concern in China. The army could create employment, participate in the modernisation of the country and invest in all sorts of new fields, such as tourism, hotel management, arms trade, real estate management, etc... The great strategists of the old days who had managed to survive the Japanese and Chiang Kai-shek's troops were now replaced by CEOs (with ties).

In 1998, partly to regain the control over the army and eventually to eradicate the deep corruption in the PLA enterprises, Jiang and his Premier Zhu Rongji decided to ask the army to divest itself from most of its businesses. At that time the PLA owned some 15000 companies with an estimated turnover of US\$ 25 billions<sup>iv</sup>; Very recently, Jiang Zemin issued a directive reasserting the supremacy of the Chinese Communist Party over the army and insisted that the PLA "is the people's army under

the absolute leadership of the party and embodies an important force of the political superiority of the party and the state government.”

Today, a year later, most of the observers feel that the ‘divestment’ of the PLA has been a total failure. The corruption was perhaps already too deep for the plan to succeed and most of the assets of the former army enterprises have only been disposed off to fill up the pockets of local generals.

Last April, when the CCP and the PLA commissions began auditing the accounts of the former army enterprises, they found not only embezzlement, false accounting, hiding of proceeds abroad, large-scale disappearance of assets and last but not least, extensive borrowing knowing that the loans would never be refunded after the ‘nationalisation’ of the Army.

Today the situation seems grimmer than ever. The assets have disappeared, the former army enterprises are sick and either the state has to pay the bill or some millions of workers employed in the army enterprises will become jobless.

The unemployment is already so high and the leaders in Beijing have not found a solution to deal with the problem. Jiang (or Zhu) have now to pay for the running and the modernisation of the army.

Beijing is facing one of its major crises, though Jiang Zemin has been able to temporarily deflect the problem on Zhu. But, even supposing that the reformists are ousted and the conservatives take full power, it will not solve the problem and it will ultimately fall back on Jiang.

In fact it is a problem without solution, the army had become independent and corrupt, but in trying to rein it, the Chinese leadership has only managed to create another problem even more unsolvable.

### **The Renegade Brother: Taiwan**

The ‘renegade’ province of China as the Communist leaders in Beijing call the Nationalist island of Taiwan is one of the biggest and most painful thorns in Beijing’s feet.

Mao thought that he could solve the problem by force in 1950, but after he was trapped by Stalin in the Korean War, he had to abandon his grandiose plan to finish off Chiang Kai-shek and be the liberator of the entire Chinese 'Empire'.

In the early 50's, the Americans got involved in Korea and though at that time they were not too inclined to support a corrupt and discredited regime, they had no other choice but to defend the Island and its regime. The occasion to take over Taiwan has not come back though Beijing has never dropped the dream of a great reunification under the Communist's aegis.

Last July President Lee Teng-Hui of Taiwan issued a statement to the effect that Beijing and Taipei had a 'special state to state' relationship. This created an upheaval in Beijing which reacted violently and lodged a very strong diplomatic protest and immediately increased its military presence in the Straits.

President Lee knew perfectly well the consequences of his announcement. The Communist regime went as far as threatening to invade the island. Many analysts pondered on the chances of a war between the two Chinas and an eventual involvement of the US Navy in the conflict.

Things had already turned sour during the presidential elections in Taiwan in 1996 when Beijing decided to fire missiles off the island's coast to threaten Taipei (not to become a democracy?).

But in July 1999 as in 1996, nothing happened except some military show of force. One question immediately comes to mind: is Beijing able to take on Taiwan militarily and invade the island?

One can seriously doubt this especially after the PLA was deprived of its business activities earlier this year. The *Foreign Affairs Magazine* in its September/October 1999 issue stated:

*China is a second-rate military power – not a first rate ...  
... Beijing clearly is a menace to Taiwan, but even Taiwanese defense planners do not believe that China can successfully invade. The Chinese missile threat is much exaggerated, especially considering the very limited success of far more massive and modern NATO*

*missile strike on Serbia. If the Taiwanese have as much will to resist as did the Serbs, China will not be able to easily cow Taiwan.*

This probably suggests that the Communist leaders were just protesting for internal public consumption and were never really serious about taking on Taipei.

Now, we could presume that President Lee would keep quiet for some time, having nearly provoked a war with the mainland, but in a 6-page article in *The Foreign Affairs Magazine* in November he placed another banderilla on his Communist colleagues' back. He wrote about the 'pernicious fiction' that the 'People's Republic of China has any right or imperative to claim sovereignty over Taiwan'. This claim, he further stated was a threat to world peace and stability.

What can we read into this sudden second offensive after a period of four months?

The answer is that the regime in Beijing is today politically and socially weak.

Contrary to most foreign analysts, Lee understands China and the Chinese mentality. After all, he is himself Chinese. He also has the best intelligence network keeping him informed of what is happening within the closed walls of Zhongnanhai.

He knows that Jiang Zemin who may parade abroad, does not lie on a bed of roses when in China. Though he appears to have full control over his lieutenants, it is certainly far from the truth.

Lee knows the sharp differences among members of the Standing Committee and what he grasps even better is that today China is a weak nation on the brink of disintegration with more unsolvable problems on its table everyday.

The article in the *Foreign Affairs Magazine* quoted earlier is titled "*Does China Matter?*" and the author's answer is 'No'. China 'is overrated as a market, a power and a source of ideas'.

If one cannot say that China is a paper tiger today, it is definitively an overrated power, mainly due to its theatrical diplomatic protests and to the extreme fascination that the United States shows for this country.

The dream of a reunification on Beijing's terms is only a dream. In the meantime, Beijing will have to live with Taipei.

### **The Minorities: Xinjiang**

One of the major problems faced by China today is the unrest in what the Chinese call the 'minorities areas'.

Most of these areas have been historically independent or autonomous under some kind of 'constitutional suzerainty' as Lord Curzon put it. It was even admitted by the Nationalist and Communist regimes in the early days.

Have the Party leaders forgotten that in 1931, when the Communists began their struggle against the nationalist regime, a provisional *Constitution of the Chinese Worker-Peasant Democratic Republic* was approved by the First All-China Congress of Workers and Peasants Deputies? This Constitution says:

*In such regions as Mongolia, Tibet, Sinkiang... the nationalities have the right to determine by themselves whether they want to secede from the Chinese Soviet Republic and form their independent states, or to join the Union..., or to form autonomous regions within the Chinese Soviet Republic.*

Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist regime followed the same policy and several times the Generalissimo repeated, even in the late forties that the different minorities have the right to self-determination and secession if so they chose.

It is only in 1949, that Mao changed his views on the subject and a new constitution for the People's Republic of China was drafted according to his new perception.

In 1945, following an uprising by the Muslim population of Sinkiang<sup>v</sup>, an independent Republic of Eastern Turkestan was declared. This republic was supported by Stalin. It is only soon after the Communists came into power in China in 1949 that Chinese Liberation Army invaded Xinjiang.

Since that time, constant uprisings have occurred and though it is not easy for news to filter through these remote areas of Central Asia, we regularly read in the press about 'unrest in Xinjiang'.

To give an example, in 1990, a large number of Uighurs revolted against the Chinese occupants and more than 1000 people demonstrated in Akto, a remote city of Xinjiang against the refusal by the Chinese authorities to give them the permission to built a mosque. As a result, thousands of Uighurs were arrested and a terrible repression followed. The Chinese government is not able to pre-empt this sort of dissidence and the only answer Beijing can find is violent repression.

Since the beginning of the nineties, tension has been mounting and the situation has worsened with the Chinese authorities cracking down even more forcefully on so-called dissidence.

It prompted President Jiang Zemin to pay in 1996 a first visit to the central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan and Uzbekistan. Jiang wanted to find a way to check the infiltration of 'Muslim separatists' through these porous borders.

Another factor which played an important role is the population transfer of ethnic Hans in the Uighur populated areas. The resentment against the colons has helped to further focalise the dissent and uneasiness of the local Muslim population.

Today more than 40% of the population of Sinkiang is Han.<sup>vi</sup>

Recently a new factor has emerged. It has further increased the fears of the Chinese leadership: it is the role of Pakistan and the mercenaries trained in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Analysts called it the 'Talibanisation' of Central Asia.

The Islamic revolution was first exported to Afghanistan during the war against Russia (thanks to the American intelligence agencies) and later the Talibans took over the country with the blessings and support from Islamabad.

Once the Islamic revolution worked in Afghanistan, it became clear that this commodity could be exported to other countries.

This moving Mujahedin population, armed with the latest weaponry and extremely well trained and equipped, is available to bring an Islamic revolution anywhere in Asia (from Chechnya to Kashmir in passing through Central Asia). Xinjiang is certainly one of the chosen spots for a future revolution. This worries Beijing immensely and it is the reason why for the first time Beijing has not fully supported its favourite partner, Pakistan in the Kargil conflict with India.

The explosive situation in Xinjiang becomes even more complicated when it is compounded by the underground wealth of Xinjiang: black gold.

### **Minorities and Oil: the Case of Xinjiang**

*"For the Industry, look at Daqing"* was one of most famous and often repeated slogans of the Maoist era. After the Communist took over China in 1949, Daqing became one of the greatest myths<sup>vii</sup> of the New China. The oil field located in northeastern Heilongjiang province was supposed to be the cradle of the new revolutionary industry which would produce more steel than the United Kingdom after a couple of decades. The message behind the myth of Daqing was that revolutionary China would soon become self-sufficient in industry. Today Daqing is still producing 50 million tons of crude, but the production is not progressing and though China has become the fifth largest oil producer in the world, China is today a net oil importer.

With its tremendous rate of development China had to turn to foreign sources to get enough energy to feed its industrial development. One of the main strategic locations for energy for the new millennium is Xinjiang and the possibility to extract petrol from this province explains the importance attached by the leadership in Beijing to their 'new dominion'. It also explains the importance of the new railway line leading from Urumqi, the capital of the province to Kashgar in the heart of Xinjiang. The project costs \$ 750 millions but was necessary to 'open' up the areas to a new industrial belt.

In the recent years, China signed billions of dollars worth of contracts to be able to maintain its industrial growth: importing natural gas from

Siberia, drilling oil fields in Venezuela, buying production from Peru, constructing a 3000 km pipeline across Kazakhstan to bring oil to Xinjiang and the main land, etc... In most of these cases, Xinjiang is very strategically important.

While the Chinese government sees an opportunity to make of Xinjiang one of the richest areas of Central Asia developing agriculture (cotton fields in particular) and oil related industries, the local population takes it as a stratagem to flood them with Han population and as much as possible extract wealth from their soil

In view of the above, Beijing cannot strategically afford to let the separatists take the upper hand in their western dominion. Not only the local oil production would suffer in the process, but also the transit of natural energies from the Central Asian Republic could be in jeopardy. It also explains that Beijing is very reluctant to grant any special status to Tibet. If the Chinese leaders agreed to sit with the Dalai Lama at the negotiating table, immediately the Uighurs would ask for similar negotiations with all the unacceptable economic consequences for China.<sup>viii</sup> Here again we only take the example of Xinjiang, but the examples could be multiplied.

### **Environment: The Three Gorges Dam**

Traditionally a successful emperor in a good dynasty is able to control the floods and the rivers of China. If the emperor is unable to check the dragon (which is the symbol of the river), it means that Heaven has withdrawn its mandate to rule and the emperor has no choice to make place for the next emperor.

Though the communist leaders are declared atheists and are not supposed to have faith in the old Chinese mythology, the facts show that since the Revolution, the Communist leaders have very been much influenced by the old Chinese myths.

This deep sense of history perhaps explains the interest that today's leadership has shown in one of the largest and most controversial project of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the Three Gorges dam on the longest Chinese river,

the Yangtse. The river is in itself a mythic river and Mao knew this well: when he wanted to recover control over the Chinese masses, he only had to dive into the Yangtse followed by his body guards and retinue and let the river carry for miles his heavy body.<sup>ix</sup>

It is after the repression on Tiananmen Square in June 1989 that Li Peng who was an engineer in hydrology and the then Prime Minister of China, decided to revive the grandiose project. In spite of all political hurdles and adverse environmental advice, the project was hurriedly pushed through and sanctioned.<sup>x</sup> At that time, Li Peng was certainly postulating to become the new emperor.

The total cost of the project is 250 billions yuans (\$ 30 billions). It will take a minimum of 16 years to build (1993-2007), the installed capacity of the dam will be 17680 MW which means it will produce 1/8th of the total electricity needed by China.

The dam will be 2 km long and the height of 185 meters.

In the seventies, the huge dam in Aswan in Egypt was the first warning that big dams are unable to deliver their promises. But in spite of the expert opinions and the resistance from within China, Li Peng decided to go ahead.

Apart from the environmental destruction caused by the submergence of vast areas, it is very doubtful if the project can ever produce the quantity of electricity projected by the planners. One of the main problems is silting of the dam reservoir.

After last year's floods in China, the government has finally realised that the wild deforestation of large areas (in particular in Kham province of Tibet) has catastrophic consequences on the flood situation. As the result of this new awareness, logging has been banned in Tibet. But with the forest gone, the top soil being washed away by torrential rains, it is justly feared that silting will obstruct the gates of the dams, thereby diminishing the production capacity.

Apart from the exaggerated capacity of the dam, many fear that an earthquake could damage the dam with disastrous consequences for the population living below the dam particularly in the cities of Wuhan and

Changsha which would be washed away. How many millions of people would die in a few seconds?

It has now been acknowledged by the Chinese government that in 1975, 240,000 died after the collapse of two dams in Banquiao and Suimanquio. Though the Chinese government is giving all assurances that the work of the Three Gorges dam will be far superior to the two above dams, are they really able to control the corruption and other factors which so often play an important role in the quality of the final project in China?

Another problem is that the dam will solve at the best only part of the problem, as it would not control the flow of the rivers between the dam and the southern sea.

The problem will eventually become more acute when the main resettlement of the population will start in 2001. We should not forget that a reservoir of 600 km will submerge more than 19 districts and townships, 140 counties and 4500 villages.

Does China need an environmental catastrophe to warn the big monkeys? And this is only one of a thousand environmental problems facing China.

### **Corruption**

Recently a Xinhua communiqué said:

*China has already declared war on corruption, prosecuting some 244,000 "economic crimes" in the first half of 1999 – a 28.6 percent increase over the first half of 1998.*

Analysts often quote corruption as one of the main problems facing China. We have briefly discussed corruption in the army and how the senior officers sold the assets of the PLA Inc. once the decision was announced to ban business by army units.

But corruption in China is endemic. It is institutionalised into the system itself in the sense that the Party is master and the only master of the game.

In India which can be compared in size, corruption is also rampant but there is a big difference, the judiciary even if painfully slow is independent from the elected power. It makes a huge difference and eventually the crooks and the mafia bosses end up in jail (if they do not manage to be

elected in the meantime). In China there is no such protection with a mono party system and a judiciary and a press completely dependent on the party bosses.

The Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji is aware of the problem and in his own way has been trying to deal with it. At China's annual National People's Congress in March Zhu admitted that 'economic order is somewhat in disarray', 'financial discipline is lax' and 'demand in the market is feeble'. He continued by pointing the finger at corruption. The origin of this dismal economic result was due to "the corrupt and incompetent cadres who skew the economy". Zhu's remedy was an injection of accountability, transparency and professionalism.

In one of the thousand odd cases which became known by all in China, the 320-million-renminbi (\$ 38 millions dollars) highway in Yunnan province in south-west China, had to be closed only a few days after it was launched because contractors had used substandard construction materials, causing subsidence.

The problem of China has been the same for centuries, when a dynasty comes to an end, the local lords (today party bosses), do not listen anymore to the Centre in Beijing and the centrifugal tendencies become too strong.

Though one good sign is that the Chinese media and TV have started reporting about corruption cases. "Ten years ago, there was no reporting that exposed official wrongdoing" said recently Xiao Xiaolin who host a TV show called 'Law and Society' and which is watched by 100 millions people. While still under the control of the Party, TV could yet be a very powerful media to fight corruption but only if the will of some senior leaders was strong enough.

Another example of the changes taking place, is the publication of the book "*The Pitfalls of Modernisation*" written by He Qinglian.

He Qinglian (she) analyses the transition from the planned economy with all the consequent changes. She states that the reforms have not resulted in a better distribution of the state assets as it was intended. She details the mechanism used by party officials or government appointed state-

enterprise managers to subvert the system and enrich themselves or their families, how the state assets have become private assets in no time and how the reforms failed.

The strength of her book and the fact that millions of copies (legal or pirated) have been sold is that for the first time, she has pointed out the grave consequences for the state if the reforms fail. Her conclusion is that the consequences will not only be economic, but also sociological and political. Resentment amongst the ordinary people will increase and those who were supposed to be the beneficiaries of the reform will eventually rebel, bringing new social and political unrest in the country.

The fact that she could speak so much about the system is due to the fact that she took great care to never criticise the leadership of the Party and the reforms themselves. She says the reforms were good, but "some" lower officials have diverted them to their own profit. She only invites the leadership to deepen the reforms.

Nevertheless, any change in the system can only come through political reforms and the dismantling of the monopoly of the party.

But are the leaders ready to open this Pandora's box? It is doubtful.

### **The Great Fear**

Recently and for the first time since 50 years a strange phenomenon has appeared openly in China: it is called Falun Gong and has created a panic amongst the top leadership of the Party.

A few weeks ago, the world press carried articles describing how millions of middle-aged (and old people) in China were doing strange physical exercises and following the 'spiritual' practice preached by a New-York based Chinese guru.

These articles detailed the repression of the new sect by the Communist regime in Beijing. Many were very surprised and could not understand why a state which has so many problems on its hands (particularly the economic and the minorities problems) could spend so much time and energy to eradicate a sect of 'spiritually' minded old people.

The obsession of Beijing to 'strike hard' on the members of the sect and eliminate all traces of the teachings raise a number of questions and lead

to a number of conclusions, the main one being that the regime in Beijing lives in fear.

In an autocratic system if the economic system fails, the people who are the sufferers usually turn against their Emperor or their supreme leader and try to depose him by force<sup>xi</sup>. The possibility of social unrest, uprisings and even rebellions or revolutions immediately looms large on the horizon. The history of China is one of a string of such rebellions and revolutions. The possibility of smooth transition characterising the democratic system is a sort of security valve, absent in the present Chinese system.

When the economic machine was running full steam, ethnic, religious, class and regional tensions were kept under control. It is easier to control masses who have a full stomach than it is hungry crowds. Mao knew it and when himself under pressure from the hundreds of millions of empty stomachs, he began wars (in 1962 against India, in 1969 against Russia) or the Cultural Revolution (in 1966). It was the best way to 'deflect' the minds of the people from their hunger and anger.

According to many analysts, Beijing is dealing harshly with the Falun Gong sect because it does not have the ability to do anything about its economic problems without worsening its social problems.

In such situation, Mao Zedong was a genial strategist. He understood the importance of diverting the attention of the masses and if the state did not have built-in ways to criticise the State, he created means within the State.

With the Great Leap Forward and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Mao pre-empted the revolutionary and centrifugal tendencies that China has experienced for many centuries. Mao himself created a state-organised revolution.

'Bombard the headquarters' was Mao's main slogan at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. With one stone Mao was able to get rid of his opponents within the Politburo and give the masses the 'social unrest' they needed to get off steam from more serious and unsolvable economic problems.

Has Jiang Zemin the guts to create his own revolution? Will people of China follow him as they followed their Great Helmsman? It is doubtful. It has to be noted that recently Beijing began using a similar method after the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, but quickly stopped after discovering that it was double edged: it could unite the people of China but could also be used by the dissidents to show their disenchantment?

When Deng Xiaoping changed Mao's economic policy, he assumed that as long as the stomachs of the people were full, the system could take a few social disturbances and some parts of the economy could be decentralised. Using individual needs as a motor of the economy, he began to dismantle the planned economy. The process could be kept in control, but depended on the flow of foreign investment.

After Deng Xiaoping took over the Emperor's mantle in 1978, "it did not matter if a cat was black or white as long as it could catch mice". The American cat was perhaps not completely white or red, but it could catch mice very well and in the process the Chinese could become richer and more glorious. It was love at first sight with the United States.

The movement continued full swing in the eighties and the nineties with the subtle result that the West slowly invaded China. This time there was no need of opium, 'foreign' investments made China completely 'addicted' to the West.

After Mao had sealed the Chinese trade borders for 20 years and tried to make China self-reliant, China swung the other way in the eighties and became totally dependent on 'foreign' monies to continue to bloom and flourish.

While China was protected from outside interference, it was easier for its leaders to maintain their internal stability. It was not too difficult to keep the masses in peace later still when the economy was developing at a double-digit rate. But now it is dreaded that if the economy fails, the investors will try at any cost to protect their own interests. This is the main fear in Beijing regarding the United States: if the economic situation

does not go to the American liking, they will try to destabilise Beijing on five fronts: human rights, democratisation, Tibet, Xinjiang and Taiwan. The bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia has been taken as a warning by Beijing that what has happened to Kosovo could happen in Tibet or in Xinjiang. This factor has recently played a very important role in the Chinese relations with their Pakistani friends and has changed Beijing perception of India and also influenced their attitude during the Kargil conflict in Kashmir.

The Falun Gong problem is also seen in the same light by Beijing which suspects Li Hongzhi, the Falun Gong leader living in New York, to be part of a grand strategy to destabilise China.

True or not true, fear is there and it explains the sudden and violent repression against the sect and the burning of all books, videos and other materials related to Li Hongzhi's teachings. Though the present action seems out of proportion, in many ways, Beijing is looking into the future and it is felt that killing a few chicken is still the best way to warn the monkeys.

Knowing their history, the leaders recognize that many rebellions (like the Nanking rebellion) have started with illumined leaders pretending to act on God's behalf or under spiritual inspiration.

Another more serious allegation has been that many commanders of the PLA are followers of the Faun Gong. It has even been reported that one member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo was also following the precepts of Li Hongzhi.

The sect has now been suppressed or repressed but is the aspiration of the people of China which came to light several times during the past 20 years (on the Democracy wall, on Tiananmen Square and more recently with the emergence of the Falun Gong) really dead?

### **The Sixth Modernisation: The spiritualisation of China**

The spiritual aspirations of the Chinese people have remained underground so far, but they are bound to re-emerge in one way or another, sooner or later - most probably sooner.

Today the stomachs may be full, but with the return of the economic crisis, fear has entered into ordinary people: what will happen tomorrow? The financial results are showing that the domestic consumption is slowing down and along with the low-rate investment in the stock exchange, the downwards spiralling of the economy has further accelerated.

The deeper consequence is that the Chinese people, especially the middle class (the Deng Xiaoping Generation) who have become relatively rich are looking for some new avenues. There is a tendency to revert to old Chinese spirituality and ethics. It explains the success of the Falun Gong which is a mixture of Buddhism, Taoism and body exercises.

The regime has to rely on brutal force only because the regime has lost the two pillars which had sustained it: the socialist ideology and ideals of Mao and the frantic developmental growth promoted by Deng.

Today, Jiang is stuck: on one side he does not know how to move the economy forward. The symptoms are not of a passing depression but a much deeper crisis. It shows in the disparity between the coastal areas in the south and the underdeveloped inland provinces and the increased unrest in the minorities areas. China seems to sink deeper into the morass everyday.

On the other hand if China decides to 'open up' to the West (and in particular to the United States), there is an obvious danger of being 'invaded' and having terms dictated by a 'foreign' and unwanted ideology. A new opium (investment) war?

The Communist leaders can see that 50 years of centralised economy has failed, but if the grip is loosened it will result in a collapse of the empire which for the Chinese means 'chaos' (and historically the fall of the emperor)

It is nevertheless certain that the United States and the Western nations, having billions of dollars at stake will not stay idle, they have to protect their investments.

The temptation to intervene in an overt or covert manner in China's affairs is always present. If the interests of the investors and Beijing clash who will be able to dictate the new terms of development?

The role of Jiang Zemin is not an easy one.

### **New Aspirations**

One thing the leaders in Beijing have never understood is the power of spiritual faith. We remember the story told to us by one of the old Tibetan officials whom we had interviewed for "The Fate of Tibet". He was the leader of the First Delegation sent in 1979 by the Dalai Lama to Tibet to ascertain the 'truth by the facts' as Deng Xiaoping had put it. Before the arrival of the Delegation, local Tibetans had been told by the Chinese authorities: *"The delegates are sent by the Dalai Lama. They are not bad people, they genuinely want to see the process brought by the 'liberation' of Tibet. Consider them as friends, do not misbehave with them, do not throw stones at them."*

The Chinese officials were so sure that their liberation had brought happiness to the Tibetan population and built resentment against the "Dalai's clique" that they firmly believed that stones might be thrown at the Dalai Lama's delegates.

The reverse happened! When the delegates reached each town, each village, each encampment, Tibetans rich and poor, old and young prostrated in front of the delegates, trying to tear pieces of the delegate's cloth to save them as relics, pulling the hair of the delegates, eating the dust under the tyre prints of their cars as *Prasad* (blessed offering).

The leadership in Beijing was so shocked that Hua Yaobang, the Secretary General of the CCP decided to visit Tibet and see for himself what had gone wrong in 20 years of failed propaganda. Like Caesar commenting about the Gaulish village, Hua must have thought: "They are mad - these Tibetans".

The Communist leaders had forgotten that Tibet had been the fortress of inner faith and historically China had often turned towards Tibet to spiritually guide the Chinese people.

Today, though official China has decided to keep the inner aspiration of its people under control, the resurgence of China's spiritual aspiration has been a factor that the leaders in Beijing cannot completely brush aside.

But are these leaders, behind the high wall of Zhongnanhai not living in a fool's paradise?

On the other side of the Straits a similar aspiration can manifest itself in a more open way. In March 1997, the Dalai Lama visited Taiwan and gave Buddhist teachings to thousands. I had occasion to see on TV the incredible image of the Dalai Lama preaching love and the deeper meaning of suffering (*dukha*) in a stadium in Kaosiung some 340 km from Taipei. *Agence France Press* reported:

*The Dalai Lama urged 50,000 people packed into a stadium here Sunday to fill their hearts with love and tolerance and cast off material wealth in search of spiritual rewards.*

*...People from all corners of Taiwan had braved a miserable, rainy day to fill the stadium in the southern city of Kaohsiung and listen for an hour and 45 minutes to a deeply philosophical sermon from the Buddhist leader.*

*The Dalai Lama, seated on a huge, flower-lined stage urged his followers to rid themselves of the scourge of selfishness. "Egoism and selfishness cause greed and greed will cause suffering to other people."*

*Despite the large crowd, there was almost complete silence as they drank in the Dalai Lama's words.*

That day the Dalai Lama spoke for about two hours as a young monk translated from Tibetan into Chinese.

What would happen if the Dalai Lama was authorised by the Chinese leadership to give the Kalachakra initiation on Tiananmen Square?

## **The Future**

Today China as a nation is going through a difficult period. The motto of Deng Xiaoping –'to become rich is glorious' - has perhaps brought more spiritual misery to China than the mad Cultural Revolution of Mao which, even in its madness, was at least driven by some apparent ideals. Today China has no ideal. Can a nation survive without ideal?

But Chinese are pragmatic people. They are searching for a new source of inspiration to rediscover their thousand-year-old civilisation.

The members of Falun Gong sect with its millions of followers, as with many others in China are trying to rediscover their roots (Buddhism, Taoism). The regime does not know how to deal with that aspiration. It knows only force and suppression.

Everywhere the human spirit is searching for new and higher ideals and it was what the French politician and philosopher, André Malraux had in mind when he said that the "twenty-first Century will be spiritual, or will not be".

No doubt, the twenty-first Century will be different.

The world is going through "whirlwind" changes: what looks improbable or impossible today, may be a reality tomorrow.

To conclude we would like to quote from the Testament of the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama written in 1932:

*As a result of our past meritorious karma and the numerous prayers and services that were conducted in Tibet, internal strife took place in China. It was no problem, therefore, to completely drive out the Chinese force from Tibet.*

*From then on the year of the Water-Monkey [1913], there was renewed happiness and peace reigned in Tibet. The high and low, rich and poor, all were content and welcomed this period with great joy and happiness.*

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<sup>i</sup> Dr. Li, the Private Physician of Mao said that there was a lot of truth in Wang's allegations and later in the sixties and seventies the life of the Politburo's members in Zhongnanhai (the very restricted enclave where the members of the Politburo live in Beijing) was very similar. (See *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* by Dr Zhisui Li, Arrow Books, London, 1994).

<sup>ii</sup> *Who will Feed China?*, Lester R. Brown, *Worldwatch Institute*, New York, 1995.

<sup>iii</sup> This is certainly one of the factors which helped to make the situation less acute in India. Another factor is that the economic liberalisation of India has been less successful, partially due to the obstructive license Raj established by the Nehruvian economic planners and the red tapism of the bureaucracy. The industrial development has also

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been more decentralised than in China.

<sup>iv</sup> To show the magnitude of the problem, the total annual budget for the US army is only US\$ 9 billions.

<sup>v</sup> Now known by its Chinese name , 'Xinjiang' meaning 'New Dominion'.

<sup>vi</sup> .The same method has been used in the other 'minorities' areas. In Tibet, 7 millions of Chinese have outnumbered 6 millions of Tibetans, in Inner Mongolia, 15 millions of Han migrants are dominating 3 millions of Mongols and even worse has happened in Manchuria.

<sup>vii</sup> In Daqing, the revolutionary workers were supposed to lug 60-ton oil rigs on their shoulders.

<sup>viii</sup> That is the reason why the Tibetan issue is not a simple one as it involves many other aspects which are usually forgotten by the Western media.

<sup>ix</sup> His most famous swim in the Yangtse in August 1966, marked the beginning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, hundreds of millions of Chinese saw that the emperor was still the master of the great river.

<sup>x</sup> One third of the deputies in the People's National Congress walked out as a sign of protest when voting took place.

<sup>xi</sup> It has recently been the case in Indonesia.