

## Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet

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Tenzin Gyatso, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama of Tibet turns 75 today.

What a remarkable life! Born in a small village of Amdo province of north-eastern Tibet, Lhamo Dhondrub (as he then is called) is recognized as the reincarnation of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama at the age of four. For the Tibetans, the living incarnation of Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion has finally returned.

Since centuries, the Land of Snows has remained untouched by the changes and revolutions happening elsewhere in the world.

Tibet is still Shangrila on earth, when in October 1950, the serene state of affairs dramatically changes: the Chinese People's Liberation Army march unhindered onto Tibetan soil. They bring a new ideology to 'liberate' the Land of Snows.

For India the consequences are dramatic. She now has a new neighbour and her peaceful and undisputed northern border soon becomes the object of a bitter dispute which still continues sixty years later.

In November 1950, at the age of 15, Tenzin Gyatso becomes the temporal head of the Tibetan nation.

For a few years, he tries to 'cohabitate' with the invaders. In 1954, he goes to China to meet his new Communist masters. He thinks then that Marxist ideology could perhaps be useful to develop and modernize his country. During 6 months, he has numerous encounters with Mao Zedong and other old revolutionary leaders from the Long

March. While in Beijing, the Dalai Lama takes the opportunity to begin his training in international politics. He meets Nehru, Khrushchev and Bulganin who have come on a State visit. Sometimes in the evening, the Great Helmsman himself comes to his guest house to discuss with him. Mao wants to convince him that 'religion is a poison'. The Young Lama is ready to accept many compromises, but not this one. Dharma has ruled Tibet for centuries and Tenzin Gyatso believes that religion should remain the center of the nation's life.

On his return to Lhasa, he discovers the ruthlessness of the Communists: compassion and tolerance have no place in the dictatorship of the Party; Marxism cannot help the Land of Snows realize Tenzin Gyatso.

The rest of the story is well-known. In March 1959, after an uprising in Lhasa against the Chinese invaders, the Dalai Lama has to flee his country. Following an epic ride through the highest passes of the world, he reaches Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh and is immediately granted asylum by India.

After a few months in Mussorie, Nehru's Government finds a suitable place for him in Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh.

While Nehru provides rehabilitation and education for 85 000 Tibetan refugees, the Indian Prime Minister makes it clear from the start that India will not give political support to free Tibet from the Chinese yoke. Delhi attaches too much importance to a newly-found friendship with Beijing.

The Dalai Lama begins then his quest to find a 'middle path' solution to ease the sufferings of his people. Though he adheres to his Buddhist values, he remains pragmatic. He is convinced that if a solution is to be found to a problem, each party should make a step forward.

With no real alternative, the Dalai Lama drops his claim for independence and just asks for a 'genuine autonomy'.

Beijing is today in a position of force; it believes that the Tibetan leader will be forced to make further compromises.

Time seems indeed to be on the Chinese side; Beijing knows that the Dalai Lama is not here forever. They know the weakness in the reincarnation system: there is always a gap of 20 years before a new leader is able to take over the reins of the nation.

Last week, Hao Peng, the Deputy Communist Party Secretary in the Tibetan Autonomous Region states that 'anti-Chinese' forces led by the Dalai Lama remains the main threat to the region, but he adds: "We have the ability and confidence to maintain stability in Tibet forever". The Tibetan leader who recently completed 50 years in India (which he refers to as 'Aryabhumi') has always demonstrated his love for India and her people. He explains: "I consider Indians as my gurus, because we follow the Nalanda tradition. All our concepts and way of thinking come from the Nalanda Masters." Though Tibet has gone through "lots of ups and downs over thousand years, we have kept intact the Nalanda tradition. That means that we are reliable chelas." And he laughs.

Sixty years after the Chinese arrival in Tibet, many believe that the Dalai Lama is the key to stability on the Tibetan plateau. The sooner China will recognize this, the better it will be for the stability of the Middle Kingdom and peace in Asia.