



Tibet : Another World

A look at the French Press' vision of Tibet in 1950

Tibet Journal, Dharamsala, 2001

Introduction

Recently, while I was visiting France, I came across a series of newspaper articles¹ which were written a couple weeks after the People Liberation Army of Mao Zedong invaded the Eastern Tibetan province of Kham in 1950. It is tremendously interesting to go through these clippings and an eye opener to discover what impressions and perspectives senior correspondents and so-called Tibet experts held at this crucial time of Tibetan history. For me, it has been a continuation of my research into this troubled period.²

I shall review some of the subjects touched upon by the French press during the period between October 25 and November 10, 1950, the main aim of this paper being to show how Tibet was perceived and the ideas prevalent in the media (and the general public) at the time of the invasion of Kham. In fact, during the course of this short period most aspects of the political, cultural and mythical life of Tibet are depicted in detail in the French press.

In this paper, I shall consecutively look at maps and boundaries; the invasion, the life on the Roof of the World before 1950; the events of 1949-1950; the ideas prevalent about the Tibetan army; the role and life of the Dalai Lama and the rivalry between the latter and the Panchen Lama. Before concluding, I shall quote from some articles on the myth which was Tibet.

Why choose the French Press alone? First, it is a time-consuming process to go through press archives of several papers. Secondly after having studied in some detail the Indian press and a few articles in the American press, I find that the image given of Tibet is more or less the same as the correspondents usually had access to the same source.³

Background

I shall first give a short historical background to the period covered by this paper (October-November 1950).

On January 1, 1950 just three months after taking over China, the communist regime in Beijing broadcasted an ominous communiqué: *"The task for the People's Liberation Army for 1950 is to liberate Taiwan, Hainan and Tibet."*

Not many in Tibet took the threat seriously; very few feared that the Red Army might soon engulf their country. Most had forgotten that in 1932, the 13th Dalai Lama had predicted for Tibet, a fate similar to Mongolia:

... remember the fate that befell the Mongolian nation when Communists overran the country and where the Head Lama's reincarnation was forbidden, where property was totally confiscated and where monasteries and religion were completely wiped out. These things have happened, are happening and will happen in the land which is the centre of Buddhism (i.e. Tibet).⁴

At that time on the Roof of the World, many believed that the power of mantras and incense-burning was as forceful as the 'barrel of the gun'. In autumn of 1950, the Tibetan government of Lhasa however decided to mass 3000/4000 equipped troops on the Upper Yangtze (Drichu) dividing Kham province.

Who could realize that the new revolutionary ideology⁵ blowing from the east would soon mean the end of the old Tibet?

However, the main viewpoint emerging from all these clippings is that Tibet was an unknown world. An article in *Le Parisien Libéré*⁶ resumed the situation:

[Compared] to other parts of the world, Tibet has an inappreciable advantage: one can say anything without worrying about being contradicted. The reason for this is simple: the best informed people know only the boundaries. Only the rarest of the travellers, exceptionally brave, went through this land. They can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Nobody really penetrated Tibet.

Maps and Boundaries

But let us first have a look at Tibet's boundaries. No one was clear about them. The same paper quoted earlier gave an example of discrepancies with regard to the area covered by the Land of Snows. Even world experts disagreed:

A serious American publication speaks of 500000 square kilometres, a German one prefers 900000, the annals of the Society of Nations spoke of 736000 sq/km and the German Office of Statistics declared with a remarkable precision that the area was 125788 square kilometres.⁷

While going through other articles, we shall see that each journalist, each editor had his own source and his own figures.

This can be partly explained by the fact that at the tripartite Simla Convention between Great Britain, Tibet and China in 1914, the British tried to divide Tibet into two parts: Outer Tibet roughly corresponding to Central Tibet (U-Tsang province for the Tibetan) and Inner Tibet (the provinces of Kham and Amdo bordering China in the East).⁸

Fifteen years after the British had first partitioned Tibet (1914), the Nationalist government in China thought⁹ to use the two parts division of Tibet to its advantage. However it is only in the sixties that the communists 'officially' divided the Roof of the World into several parts which were attached to the Chinese provinces of Sichuan, Chinghai, Yunan, Gansu. From that time on, only Central Tibet (formerly the Outer Tibet of the British) would be known as the "Tibet Autonomous Region".

It is most interesting to discover, at the end of 1950, no 'administrative' division of Tibet existed. All the newspapers present the same map of Tibet with its three provinces.¹⁰ The communist regime's cartographic aggression showing the division of Tibet¹¹ begun much later.

Reproduced here are a few of the maps published in 1950, in particular by *Le Soir*, the organ of the French Communist Party (PCF).

Only one Swiss paper¹² pointed out to Chinese division of Tibet into different parts.

It is good to remind the reader that there are two or even three Tibets:
1- Independent Tibet, that the Chinese call Sitsang, which is invaded by the Chinese now. Its capital is Lhasa.

2- 'Chinese' Tibet or Sikang with its capital Kangting (before Tatsienlu)

3- Little Tibet or Ladakh.

Geographic notions remained very vague, to cite an example, *Le Matin*¹³ wrote on the two access points to the Roof of the World:

However this closed world was accessible through two points. The Chinese can reach it through the east and Assam. The British used to have their road in the west. The British road, described by Kipling is the one which passed by Peshawar, Srinagar, le Soji-la. It is still the great passage of the Himalayan expeditions.

It is not clear why Assam is mentioned. The main road used by the British was through Nathu-la in Sikkim and then to the Chumbi valley or less frequently through Tawang (today in Arunachal Pradesh).

The Invasion¹⁴

On October 7, 1950, Chinese troops crossed the Yangtze and began their 'liberation' of Kham. Ten days later, the capital of the province fell with little resistance from the Tibetan troops and an immediate surrender by Kalon Ngabo Nwagang Jigme, the Tibetan Governor of the province.

One of the most distressing events of the 20th century was underway and the world remained unaware of it! Days passed, 15th, 16th, 17th, 20th October. Still no news in the press.

It would finally take more than two weeks for the information to filter through, this is the first great surprise for the researcher attempting to read through the press of this period. Nothing appeared in newspapers (in France or elsewhere) before October 26/27 -- nearly two weeks after the events which shook the Land of Snows had begun unfolding.

The Tibetan government knew nothing, the Indian government had heard nothing, and the Chinese were keeping quiet. Other governments, depending on India for news, were not 'informed'.

It should be pointed out here that all communications (wireless, postal or others) were the monopoly of Government of India. The only information trickling out through the Himalayan barrier was new that the Government of Tibet and New Delhi agreed to share with the rest of the world.¹⁵ To give a

very concrete example: I recently came across an extraordinary document¹⁶: a coded telegram from the Tibetan Kashag in Lhasa to their representative in Delhi. The cable was sent through the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and forwarded to a Tibetan government officer in Delhi with a covering letter stating "with compliments". It shows to what extent the communications to and fro Tibet were in fact a monopoly of Nehru's government.

[picture of letter]

But why was Lhasa keeping so quiet? In the words of Robert Ford, the British radio operator in Chamdo:

The Chinese have attacked Tibet. Tibet wants help. Peking is silent for obvious reasons. What on earth can Lhasa gain by pretending the war does not exist? No one answered.

The analysis of Ford may be correct when he said:

I could only think it was a matter of habit. The Lhasa Government was so used to the policy of saying nothing that might offend or provoke the Chinese that it kept it on after provocation had become irrelevant. It was still trying to avert a war that had already broken out.¹⁷

Lhasa had not bothered to inform the world that Chinese troops had begun to infiltrate the Eastern parts of Amdo and certain parts of Kham as early as September 1949.

Finally on October 25, the Chinese themselves announced that Tibet was 'liberated.' A brief communiqué of the New China News Agency (*Xinhua*) says: "*People's army units have been ordered to advance into Tibet to free three million Tibetans.*"

It is only the next day, 26th October, nineteen days after the beginning of the military operations that some articles mentioned the invasion for the first time.

"The Communist troops are reported to march towards Tibet" titled *Le Figaro*.¹⁸

The sad irony of the situation was that the information had originated from the Chinese news agency and all the newspapers were only quoting *Xinhua*: "*Radio Peking has declared that the conquest of Tibet was a 'glorious task' which would put the final seal on the unification of communist China.*"

Still nobody was sure if Tibet had been invaded or not. *Le Figaro* added:

From authorized sources as well from sources close to the Chinese embassy, it was declared in New Delhi that there was no confirmation of the information according to which the Chinese troops would have invaded Tibet.

...Indian circles considers as not very plausible an invasion of Tibet at this particular time."

Confused also was the Indian press. Though on 26 October, *The Hindu*¹⁹ reported that on the Korean front there were "300,000 Red Chinese on the border with North Korea and Manchuria", it admitted that the Indian Government "has not yet received an official report of the invasion of Tibet by Chinese troops, a spokesman of the Government of India said here today."

On October 28, exactly three weeks after the crossing of the Yangtze, *L'Humanité*²⁰ confirmed the content of the Chinese communiqué:

...[The Army proclamation] calls upon the Chinese soldiers to strictly adhere to all the measures of discipline, to do a strenuous work of information and propaganda, to learn the dialects of the locals and to help them to overcome their poverty.

...The proclamation tells the troops that the building of Tibet will be a long-term work and that all decisions should be taken accordingly. They should spare men and material during their advance and quickly build roads to be able to develop communications. All efforts should be made to accelerate the economic and cultural development of Tibet as soon as the hostilities are over.

The same day *La Croix*²¹ explained that the news must have taken time to filter through "due to the transmission difficulties". However quoting from the correspondent of *The Statesman* in Kalimpong, the main trade centre dealing with Tibetan goods in North India, the newspaper said that:

The invasion of the Kham province, in the northern part of the Suikang (Xikang) under Tibetan control must date more than 10 days back, according to the latest information received from Kalimpong.

... though the Tibetans are determined to fight till the last, the communist superiority in number and in equipment does not leave any doubt on the final result of the battle.

It also commented on Shakabpa's delegation leaving for Beijing for talks at the same time that the PLA crossed the Yangtze. The first negotiations held in Delhi had failed before they had even started. Retrospectively, one can say that these parleys were a trap to put the Tibetan and Indian government to sleep. As it appears now from the Russian archives, that Mao had discussed the invasion with Stalin in January 1950 and his army commanders had made plans accordingly. *La Croix* continued:

While in New Delhi, the Tibetan delegation which was proceeding to Peking to discuss the Sino-Tibetan relations, declined the offer of the Chinese Ambassador who offered them Chinese passports to facilitate their journey. This would have meant an acceptance of the Chinese sovereignty over Tibet.

This Catholic paper ended with giving its readers historical background of missionary's activities in Tibet and their failure to convert the Tibetans due to the closed-door policies of the Tibetan government:

The first missionaries arrived in Tibet in 1625 and built a church in Tsaparang.

In 1844 the Father Huc could only stay six weeks in Lhasa.

Two years later, the Mission was given to the Fathers of the Foreign Mission in Paris. But from 1863, the Fathers were forbidden to enter the country.

Two days later, *L'Humanité*²² continued to propagate Beijing and Moscow's points of view. The French communists, by choice or by conviction had to fall 'in line' with their comrades in China and Soviet Union. This would be a recurrent feature of the communist press²³. *L'Humanité's* article quoted from another Soviet paper *Troud* about the role of the western 'imperialists':

...Yesterday, the Soviet newspaper *Troud* reminded us that British-American imperialists are trying to use Tibet as a "backdoor for a new aggression against China" and that the reactionary leaders in Lhasa (the Tibetan capital) were conspiring with the United States and Great Britain for trying to get the support of the British-Americans for splitting Tibet from China.

...In conclusion, the Soviet newspaper reminds us that Tibet is a non-exploited source of wealth, gold, silver, copper, iron and petrol, but is desperately backward due to the feudal regime and the foreign domination.

On November 10, *Xinhua* News Agency itself explained that Mao and Zhu De were “deeply concerned about the prolonged oppression of the Tibetan people by British and American imperialism.” For this reason, they had decided to “move into Tibet to help the Tibetan people to shake off the oppression for ever.”²⁴

*Le Figaro*²⁵ countered the Soviet press which had been using the double arguments of the imperialist threat on the Roof of the World and China’s protection of its western borders²⁶) to justify to the world the attack on a peaceful nation. The New York correspondent of *Le Figaro* wrote with irony:

Today, it is not rare to hear newspaper readers give a bitter homage to the communist news agency for not having added a third well known argument: there was a necessity for peaceful China to respond to the Tibetan aggression.

The rest of the sobering column written from America clearly saw the strategic and political implications for India, the new neighbour of communist China and called upon its readers to carefully watch the reaction of Nehru and his government.

Before the ‘Liberation’

What was the situation before the Chinese troops of the Second Field Army of Marshall Lui Posheng crossed the Yangtze? Most of the articles dealt at length on this subject, often without proper information.

On the legal status of Tibet, *Le Parisien Libéré*²⁷, summed up the situation: “It is not easy to define whom Tibet belonged to: theoretically to China... but practically to nobody...”. But who is ‘nobody’? For many, it was to the ‘lamas’. For the communist paper, *Le Soir*²⁸ the ‘lamas’ were the villains of the piece. The ‘serfs’ were exploited by the feudal lords (the lamas) and were anxiously waiting to be ‘liberated’ by the People’s Army of Chairman Mao.

The conditions of existence are the same as those of the serfs in the middle ages. They do not possess anything; their land, their houses and their tools belong to the monasteries.

...Practically, the monks have the right of life and death over them.

The lives of the monks who spent their time dealing with 'demons' are vividly portrayed.

The days are spent reciting countless litanies accompanied by the sound of the sacred drum, turning the prayer wheels and invoking the demons which are called to bother the irreligious farmers who are guilty of paying an insufficient amount [in tax] to the monasteries.

... One can say that the whole political, economic and cultural structure of the State is in the hands of the lamas.

*Le Parisien*²⁹ though less critical of the unfortunate lamas, told its readers that the prayers wheels were decorated with ribbons (*enrubanné*)!

The centre of every township was a 'lamasery'. The rest was nothing else than its outbuildings. Some are small and some are immense. Meditation is the main activity, not to say the only activity and it concentrates around the famous prayer wheel decorated with ribbons.

One should remark here that the blame of not making Tibet better known can squarely be put on the Tibetans, especially on the most conservative strata of the society (which often resided in the large monasteries around Lhasa). If better information had been available to the press and if Tibet had not been closed for the past century to foreigners, things could have been different in 1949/50. Lhasa would certainly have been able to gather a greater support for their just cause. Only very few adventurers, like Alexandra David-Neel, Swen Hedin or Jacques Bacot had visited Tibet and most of them had restricted their exploration to the Tibetan marches.

To give one example amongst hundreds of similar ones: in 1950, Trumbull, the Delhi correspondent of the *New York Times* wanted to visit Tibet. He addressed a request for this purpose, to the Tibetan Foreign Bureau³⁰. He wrote that he was keen to travel to Tibet in spring 1950 "for the purpose of writing a series of news dispatches interpreting the current position of Tibet to American readers". He further explained that for the past three and half years, he had

*"frequently been called upon to write about Tibet from information available here", but now he needed first hand information "which could undoubtedly have greater influence upon American thinking as regards the friendly but seldom visited land of Tibet."*³¹

Unfortunately for Trumbull and his American readers, the permission was refused. Nobody could visit Tibet and as a result, correspondents, writers and others had to depend on vague second-hand information. We should therefore not be surprised by the way Tibet was described.³²

*La Tribune de Genève*³³ a Swiss newspaper told its readers how its correspondent saw the famous lamas and their battle:

The Tibetan lamas less than a year ago were living in the lethargic atmosphere of a monastic life without worries and troubles. Today, they are burying their treasures in the crevices of innumerable rocks. The nation which was living outside the world, though inside the world, has become the battlefield of a modern ideology which is attempting to change overnight what seemed timeless.

It went a step further in predicting that it would not be so easy for the foreign invader to brainwash the strong willed Tibetans. In many ways this foresight has been proved during the last fifty years.

The regime of the lamaist aristocracy will perhaps have a successor which will only be a foreign organization imposed by the invader. But it will not be so easy to destroy a spiritual power which has survived for centuries in its castle of eternal Himalayan snow, challenging the entry of the mechanical evolution the rest of the world was subject to.

However, it failed to see the strategic and ideological importance of the Tibetan plateau.

But what benefit would the invader gain from the conquest of 700000 square kilometres of rocks, sands, and Tibetan glaciers?³⁴ There is no resource for modern industries.

It means it is only a question of prestige: to convert a people which till this day, has no notion of politics and make them 'possessed' by that ideology in the same way as they were 'possessed' by metaphysics.

But these rocks, sand and glaciers (whether in Tibet or in Ladakh) meant more than just 'prestige' for Mao. It was the best way for him to become the indisputable leader of Asia. Nehru, who also claimed to be the foremost representative of New Asia, understood this point when it was only too late! For *Le Parisien Libéré*³⁵, Tibet was primarily a barren immensity and as very few could contradict him, the author went to compare Tibet to areas which were closer by and better known by French scientists and scholars.

Desert, more desert and still desert. Some grass, here and there, a vegetation which reminds one of the Saharan 'reg', some starving herds from which live a sparse population (from a poor milk diet). Some cities, grown near a water point, lake or river, and lost in a lonesome immensity, and yurts of the nomadic herders.

Tibet was not exactly the Sahara though recently, a cinema director decided to shoot a movie on the life of the Dalai Lama in Morocco³⁶. After all there was perhaps some resemblance.

The *Gazette de Lausanne*³⁷ gave some new figures on the area and the population of Tibet:

Independent Tibet: the highest and the largest plateau in the world. Its altitude varies between 4000 and 5000 meters over an area of 1200000 square meters [sic]. The population is about 4 millions of people, amongst them 400000 are lamas, or monks of a religion which is the result of the mixture of Buddhism, animism and shamanism.

In the spiritual field, opinions were also diverse. Later in this paper, we shall see that for some journalists, Tibet was the last remnant of the continent of Atlantis, while for others, it was just the last spiritual society in the world.

*Le Journal de Genève*³⁸ considered that Tibet is a spiritual society fully dedicated to inner life:

Thus, Tibet represents in today's world, apart from the Christian Church and the great Islamic community, one of the last centers of contemplative life, fully turned towards invisible realities. Its influence is spreading as far as Mongolia. It is this, precisely, that the communist Chinese want to kill.

This Swiss paper correctly pointed out: *"As soon as [China] got rid of the last vestiges of the western imperialism, it aspired in its turn to impose its domination on defenceless and harmless people."*

It appears rather strange that the Chinese, so traumatized by the misdeeds of the 'imperialist' powers in China during the first part of the 20th century, became in turn 'imperialists' of the worse type barely a few months after their 'liberation'. We have to point out here that it is precisely for a similar reason, that India would decide to 'abandon' Tibet. The idealist Indian Prime Minister remained firm on one point: *"we have suffered from the imperialists, we shall not become imperialists ourselves"*, though India had inherited the treaty advantages from the British³⁹. For example India had a Mission in Lhasa and the telegraph lines belonged to India, but Nehru for fear of being seen as a new imperialist, gave away everything to the communists without noticing that in the process a small peaceful nation was erased from the map of Asia.

Le Journal de Genève clearly saw the outcome of Tibet's disappearance. From the time that the United Nations did not come to the rescue of a small peaceful state, the world body lost its real meaning. It soon became an ideological battle field for the larger powers, but smaller states had seen that no justice could not be delivered by the world body:

However, this treacherous attack, without the shadow of a justification, will have very deep political repercussions. Coming soon after the Korean affair and after the active support given by the Communist Chinese to the army of North Korea, then to the Viet Minh, it appears as a direct challenge directed at the UN.⁴⁰

Like many other papers, this Swiss paper saw the serious consequences for Tibet's neighbour, India. Unfortunately, the Indian Prime Minister, in spite of the warnings given by many of his colleagues, particularly his Deputy, Sardar Patel, refused to read the signs on the wall.

However, this new provocation is aiming much less the western powers than the government of the neighbouring India which intervenes non-stop in Lake Success in favour of the admission of the Republic of Mao Zedong and which guaranteed of the conciliating intentions of the Chinese dictator. It is a grave deception and a cruel rebuttal for Pandit Nehru who

has dreamt to finally see the triumph of the spirit and the teachings of his master, the Mahatma Gandhi, in a finally free Asia.

But Gandhi has fallen under the bullets of his own countrymen and even before being able to realize, Asia found itself brutally cut into two by an iron curtain which leaves far behind the antique Great Wall of China.

The great irony was that India continued to push in favour of the admission of China to the UN. *Combat*⁴¹ wrote that Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Nehru's sister and India's Representative in the UN, had declared in New York that India was still putting all its energy to get China in the UN. She went so far as to declare that it was because China had not been accepted earlier in the world body that the 'regrettable' invasion had occurred.

Mrs. Pandit has declared that regrettable as the Tibetan affair may be, India should not come out of her fundamental neutrality. India wants to put all its energies for the preservation of peace.

The obsession of some Indian leaders to get Mao's regime recognised at any cost did not trouble the Chairman of the CCP. In the already quoted conversation⁴² with Stalin, he told the Soviet dictator in January 1950:

Comrade Mao Zedong: Several countries, especially Britain, are actively campaigning to recognize the People's Republic of China. However, we believe that we should not rush to be recognized. We must first bring about order to the country, strengthen our position, and then we can talk to foreign imperialists.

India had already recognised the People's Republic, but it took several months for China to accept the 'recognition'.

*Le Franc-Tireur*⁴³ added on the same subject:

It has been pointed out [by the Indian government] that if India has projected itself as the champion of the entry of the Peking government in the UN, it is because it has based this political decision on a realist conception of the situation.

Though many in the leftist intelligentsia liked to believe that the Tibetan events would not have taken place if communist China had been recognized by the west, most of the western press could not understand this action of Mao. *Le Matin*⁴⁴ wrote quite virulently:

But why, damn it, have the communists invaded Tibet?

This is the question that an astounded world is today asking.

Tibet, this gigantic plateau inlaid between a series of unspoiled mountains, the highest amongst the highest has formed a separate, enclosed, lunar world.

... No contact with the world, no commerce, therefore no quarrel, ever.

This people was so peaceful and so uniquely peaceful, that it did not even take care to have diplomatic relations with the head of state of the great powers. Tibet had no embassy in Washington, in Paris, in London, in Moscow. Not even with the great neighbor, India. Nowhere! What was the use!

Today the invader would not be able to find the shadow of a justification for its crime. The Fable of the Wolf and the Lamb has never been better illustrated than by this unprovoked aggression.

An Indian politician, Dr R.M. Lohia made a similar remark when he spoke 'infanticide' to describe the invasion.

But Mao had his own reasons, controlling Tibet at little cost was first a question of prestige for New China, strategically it would enable China to dominate the Indian subcontinent and ideologically, it was a first step towards the 'socialization' of South Asia.

Mythic Tibet

We come across many strange descriptions of Tibet, but one of the strangest was in an article in *Combat*⁴⁵. It began by explaining to its readers that the invasion of Tibet is not an ordinary invasion, there is something more behind it, an inner meaning: *"for the lovers of signs and occult connections, the invasion of Tibet by the Chinese troops takes a particularly important meaning."*

After a short description of the religious scene prior to the invasion when Tibet, was "essentially devoted to prayers, to the adoration of the Divine and to inner life", the journalist expounded his occult theory about the remnants of the Atlantis civilisation:

Tibet has a very special place in the Atlantis tradition. According to this tradition, the Atlantis, the motherland of a supremely wise and powerful humanity, kept the secrets of a communion with the spirit and the living matter which we have lost and which modern technology is powerless to recover.

Before the disappearance of this continent (and knowing in advance the fatal character of this disappearance), the initiated Atlantes have scattered through the entire world, in Egypt, in the Baltic countries, in Colombia and in Tibet and the druidic, Egyptian and Colombian civilizations are the degraded proof of this initiation. The Atlantes colonies have been linked by supernatural means to the mother-colony, Tibet.

It is in Tibet itself, in an underground, sacred and inviolable city, l'Agatharta that according to them, are kept the last Atlantis secrets.

The article in *Combat* went on to depict what some Europeans have seen in Tibet.

It is in Tibet, amongst other things, that a Christian missionary has seen the 'Tree of Life', which does not belong to any known species. Each of its leaves is different from any other species, it bears mysterious characters said to be close to runic characters.

It is also in Tibet that European travellers claim to have seen several times cases of levitation or reanimation.

The 'Tree of Life' mentioned here is most probably the tree of Tsong Khapa in Kumbum near the Chinese border. Having sprung up after the birth of the Buddhist master and reformer, on the site of his birth, the Tibetans believed that this tree had sacred mantras on each of its leaves. One of the strangest remarks was about the swastika.

It is in Tibet, finally that one can find as a main sacred sign, the swastika, the first sign designed by man assigned an intentional signification.

The journalist concluded like many others that with the invasion of Tibet, a world was disappearing: a world of wisdom living outside time and space. He quoted the French explorer, Andre Guilbaud:

There is something worrying to think that the last State which had for first and almost unique preoccupation the cult of wisdom and inner life should now hear the pounding of the boots and of the rattling of machine-guns.

Another Myth

The vision of the communist newspapers can also be considered as another myth. They thought that communist China was bringing a real 'liberation' to the people of Tibet who were eagerly waiting for them in order to start a new life, a free and 'socialist' life.

The irony is that after a few years, it the common man (the so-called ex-slave) who rebelled against the Chinese occupiers. The Khampa movement as well as the uprisings, notably the main one in Lhasa on 10 March 1959, all had a strong popular base and it was more the aristocracy and the clergy which were often ready to collaborate with the Chinese leadership. *Le Soir*⁴⁶ commented:

As for the Tibetan farmer, no one can doubt that he envisages with joy to leave the rank of a slave and become a free man. Though it was announced that the PLA would have to fight very hard to enter Tibet, they had already reached Lhasa. On their way, they received an enthusiastic welcome of the newly freed people.

However, it was the farmers and the poor people who suffered the most due to the food restriction imposed by the Chinese forces. Tibet had never starved for centuries but with the occupation of Tibet and the influx of the troops of the 'Liberation' army in the early fifties, for the first time food was scarce in Tibet. As always in such case, the poor man suffered the most. The worst and the not-well known fact of the story is that India soon begun supplying rice to Tibet to feed the Liberation Army. And the job of these troops was to build roads leading up to India, one of the roads even cut through the Indian territory in Ladakh!

Apart from ideological justifications, the communist paper also admitted that there were serious strategic implications if Tibet was not liberated:

... In fact, Tibet has a considerable strategic importance and it is essential for the success of the American plans of domination of Asia. It is like a thorn planted in the body of People's China.

And concluded by quoting a Chinese paper:

...It does not mean the annexation of a foreign country but as explained by a newspaper in Chung King, "reuniting the people of Tibet with the family of the great motherland" while maintaining Tibet in the framework of an autonomous republic.

What a forceful return to their 'motherland' for the poor recalcitrant Tibetans! It should be noted that today 50 years after the 'liberation' of Tibet, all these arguments (except the strategic one) have fallen apart.

The Army

Some of the most incredible rumours circulated in the Press about the strength and training of the Tibetan defence forces.

*L'Aurore*⁴⁷ described the elite force guarding Chamdo.

The elite of this small army of some 3000 men is concentrated in the mountain fortress of Chamdo. Its commander is the British, Robert Ford, retired pilot of the RAF.

In Chamdo, Ford has organized a formidable fortified camp which should stop the Chinese for weeks. Unfortunately, it is known that the Chinese have secured the services of a Tibetan ex-brigand known to his countrymen as the Sand Vulture and who knows all the mountain paths and the tracks of the Roof of the World.

Unfortunately for the Tibetans the troops could not really be termed as 'elite': in fact, these 3000 odd badly-equipped soldiers were the only troops available to defend the Land of Snows and poor Robert Ford was certainly not their commander. He had been engaged by the Tibetan government to set up a communication link between Lhasa and Chamdo and was very junior in the government hierarchy. It is quite pathetic to read Ford's memoirs and his renewed pleas to Ngabo, the Governor of Kham during the months before the attack. He wanted wireless sets to be supplied to the border areas, in particular Riwoche where the attack eventually occurred, but being too junior, his advice to the Governor did not prevail

Further, *L'Aurore* mentioned a reserve 'field' army which never existed.

The Tibetan field army, about 20000 men, now the last force which opposes the Chinese, is commanded by a Viennese electrician, Heinrich Harrer. Jobless in Austria, he accepted, two years ago to come and work on the installation of the power station sold by the British to Tibet.

The days following the Chinese attack showed the weakness of the preparation of the Tibetan defence and after the fall of Chamdo, nothing, except the weather, could stop the advance of the PLA towards the Tibetan capital.

L'Aurore called it the 'Black Wind',

Will the Black Wind stop the Reds?

In final analysis, only one force can block the Chinese offensive, the weather. At the beginning of November, when the winter sets, the Roof of the World is swept by the Black Wind blowing from the icy solitude of the Gobi desert in Mongolia.

But it was, in fact, more the strategic considerations of Deng Xiaoping, the main brain behind the 'liberation' of Tibet, which stopped the PLA's advance at the end of October. Before resuming their advance, the PLA needed to consolidate their advance, wait for the outcome of the still-born negotiations in Delhi⁴⁸,

After Ford, it was Harrer, the Austrian mountaineer who was promoted by *L'Aube*⁴⁹ as being in charge of the Tibetan army.

The leader of this small army is a former SS officer, Heinrich Harrer. He was a member of the Himalayan expedition financed by Himmler in 1939. Harrer got stuck in Lhasa by the war and he became military advisor to the Tibetan government. After 1945, the former SS took it on himself to train a modern Tibetan army. This army comprising many mountain units is copied from the corresponding unities of the Wehrmacht and comprises infantry and engineering companies, a few squadrons of horsemen and artillery pieces.

The weaponry is modern and has been supplied first by the British and then by Japan till 1941 and more recently by the Soviet Union.

It is interesting to note that in 1950, it was known in certain circles that Heinrich Harrer was a former officer of the SS. When, a few years ago, Jean-Paul Annaud shot a film on the Austrian adventurer's book *"Seven years in*

Tibet", Harrer's past became a scoop for the world press, but fifty years ago, it was a known fact.

The role of 'Officer' Harrer in training the Tibetan army is a pure 'journalistic' invention though it is possible that the 'news' had originated from Beijing which was expert in spreading rumours which amplified like an echo over the Himalayan valleys.

Heinrich Harrer, himself wrote in his book that he used to go and watch the army on the parade ground in Lhasa, but nowhere he said that he trained the troops. It is confirmed by other sources. The training was the responsibility of the Indian army (mainly in Gyantse) and a few Indian officers had come from India for the purpose. Harrer recalled:

The flat pasture around Lhasa was transformed into training grounds for the troops. New regiments were formed and the National Assembly decided to call on the richer classes to furnish and equip another thousand men. It was left to them to enlist in person or to find substitutes.... There was a great deal of patriotic enthusiasm.⁵⁰

*Le Soir*⁵¹, the daily paper of the PCF also mentioned Harrer and gave him a further promotion, he was now 'General Harrer':

In the month of August, the weekly Action brought to the notice of the French public that a former German Chargé-de-Mission in Asia, General Heinrich Harrer has been requested to reorganize the Tibetan army at the instigation of the War Office in London and with the American approval. Even the information given by *Le Parisien Libéré*⁵² was very incorrect.

When news of the upheavals shaking New Asia since a few years, reverberated in Tibet, the high Lamaist dignitaries allowed for a short period, the entry of sales representatives of arms merchants in Tibet. It seems that they bought some British rifles. Last year the rumour was even heard of the visit of a mysterious Austrian officer who offered his services to prepare plans for the defence of the nation against an eventual tentative infiltration.

The fact is that the only weapons which were sold and delivered to Tibet between 1947 and 1950 were from India and though Tibet approached the

British and American government for help, Nehru's government made it clear that Tibet was India's responsibility⁵³.

Le Parisien Libéré continued with an interesting argument: as communist China was unable to take on the difficult task of recovering the 'lost' island of Formosa, Beijing had decided to tackle on an easier one -- the 'liberation' of Tibet.

In Formosa have taken refuge not only the bosses of Nationalist China, but along with them 700000 soldiers well-equipped with American arms, with planes and war ships. It is also to Formosa that the Chinese booty (*trésor*) has been evacuated.

It is why, when the situation appears too tricky for an attack on Formosa, Peking turns irresistibly its sight towards Tibet.

According to the Parisian newspaper Mao was a 'balanced' (*nuancé*) leader and *"in spite of appearances to the contrary, the communist regime would not be so happy with the unfolding of a situation which could bring about a war with the United States."*

Mao's action could be called anything but 'balanced'. He was, without any doubt, the most ruthless leader of this century and in October 1950 his first and foremost task was to save the face of communist China and prevent his North-Korean comrades for being overrun by General Mc Arthur's troops. Tibet was more an operation 'in passing'. In any case, there was no 'nuance' in his decisions and action.

A journalist even described the invasion as a 'police operation' rather than a military campaign. The fact that both fronts (the Korean and the Tibetan) were opened on the same day tend to prove this point.

The unfolding events

I shall now return to the situation at the end of October 1950.

The Tibetans had to finally admit to the world that their country had been invaded. They decided that the best way would be to appeal to the United Nations.

The rumour that Tibet would approach the UN first appeared at the end of October in *Le Franc-Tireur*⁵⁴ :

It seems that Tibet also asked that the question of the Chinese aggression be brought to the notice of the Security Council as a urgent question.

*L'Aube*⁵⁵ explained the military strategy of the Chinese commanders:

Tibet forms a natural fortress whose centre is a high plateau at an altitude of 5000 meters and which is accessible from the east through only 4 passes located between 4200 and 6000 m. These passes are open only between June and October and communists have used this 'detail' to bring 40000 men, most of their troops, inside Tibet during the first week of October.

In the meantime a correspondence had started between Nehru's government and Beijing. *Le Franc-Tireur* stated:

The Peking correspondent of Press Trust of India reports that the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs 'has no comment to give on the Indian government's communication expressing the 'surprise and regrets of the authorities in New Delhi in the face of the Chinese military campaign in Tibet.

The main point of the lengthy Indian note sent on October 30, was to express 'surprise and regrets'. What the press did not know was that in fact Panikkar, the Indian Ambassador in Beijing knew about the attack since a few months. In August, he had been told by Zhou Enlai that it was China's 'sacred duty' to liberate Tibet.

In the absence of information, wild rumours began spreading. *Le Franc-Tireur*⁵⁶ shows a picture of the young Dalai Lama sitting on his throne and questions if he would remain a god for long. Once again the only information was the official Indian source:

The rumour has spread that the Dalai Lama had been captured by the Chinese of Mao Zedong. But the Special Envoy from India in Lhasa has informed his government that neither the Dalai Lama nor the Regent had left the Tibetan capital, though the Chinese troops are said to be at only 140 kilometres away from Lhasa.

These wrong reports were not the monopoly of the French press. Most western papers continued to report the wildest rumours. For example the *New York Times* titled on November 6 "Word of Coup at Lhasa":

Reports reaching here from Tibet hinted today that the 15-year- old Dalai Lama had been intercepted by pro-Communist Tibetans in his flight from Lhasa.

Possibility that the young ruler may have fallen into pro-Communist hands followed earlier reports that the pro-Communist Tibetans, led by two Leftist monks, had seized control of the Government and intended to hand it over to the invading Chinese Communists.

[Reuters said the coup was under the leadership of Swaong Lama, senior Tibetan Buddhist monk in Lhasa.]

On the battle front, the advance had stopped; winter was closing in on Tibet and the one-eyed Marshall Lui Pocheng and Deng Xiaoping, the Political Commissar in Chengdu (Sichuan) had decided to consolidate and stabilize their advance.

*L'Aube*⁵⁷ commented that Lui Pocheng would not have advanced so easily: *'if he had not got complicities within the country [Tibet], because of the pro-Chinese and pro-Communist tendencies of certain lamas.*

This would be a recurring theme in the press: 'the Chinese had managed to make friends with many Tibetans and in many places they were received with open arms'. Actually, it was part of the Chinese propaganda which wanted to make the world believe that they were received as heroes, liberating the serfs after centuries of slavery. We shall later see that the propaganda was so well orchestrated that in the absence of any other information, it worked beautifully.

*Le Franc-Tireur*⁵⁸ also reported that Tibetans were accompanying the advancing troops.

Tibetan people's troops with Chinese communist officers and accompanied by communist political advisors have reportedly penetrated 160 kilometres inside the Tibetan territory.

According to witnesses who have later written their memoirs, very few Tibetans collaborated with the Chinese, but it is also true that most Tibetans had no hostility towards the Chinese during the first few months of the 'liberation'.

In any case, 's propaganda machine was far superior to the inexistent Tibetan one.

Le Franc-Tireur, quoting a Khampa trader, confirmed that:

He affirmed that no Chinese communist troops penetrated into Inner⁵⁹ Tibet. But the popular troops already reached Riwoche (trade agency close to the eastern border on the river Dechu).

... According to him, it is improbable that the government troops offer any resistance as the popular army is advancing towards the Tibetan capital in the name of the Panchen Lama.

In fact when these lines were written, the resistance had stopped and Ngabo had surrendered twelve days earlier.

In Beijing, Panikkar pretended that he did not know anything, though a few days earlier, he had cabled⁶⁰ Nehru that Riwoche had already fallen to the communists. *Le Franc-Tireur* wrote that Panikkar was "not able for the time being to confirm that the order [to take over Tibet] has been carried out."

After the Chinese had answered the first Indian note, *Combat*⁶¹ observed

The reply from Mr. Chou En Lai and Mao Zedong is one which could be expected. At the judicial level, the Chinese government peremptorily declares that the Tibetan question is an internal affair.

At the political level, the occupation has been decided in response to the threats caused by the manoeuvres of the imperialist powers on the Western borders on China.

... The Tibetan delegation, without losing its morale, continues on its way to Peking where they have been given the assurance that everything was ready to carry on the negotiations.

The article concluded on an amusing note (at least fifty years later) which shows once again the poor knowledge in the press (and amongst the so-called experts) of the terrain and the forces involved in the 'liberation' of Tibet:

[On the military situation] one gets only very obscure information, saying that the Chinese forces are progressing through mountain passes at an altitude of 5000 m.

Certain observers are reminding us that the Tibetans have always defended themselves against the invaders by rolling stones from the top of the mountains.

*L'Aurore*⁶² promoted Reginald Fox, the radio operator working for the Tibetan government in Lhasa to the rank of "British Representative" in Tibet.

The arrival of Reginald Fox, who is residing in Lhasa, the Tibetan capital, with the title of British Representative is awaited. Through him, we will exactly know about the situation in Tibet and whether if there is still a chance to see the Chinese invasion stopped.

However, when he arrived in Kalimpong on a sick leave, he just said that the Tibetans were reluctant to let him go on account of the tense situation and that during his absence a Russian, Ned Byelov, was managing the wireless transmission network.

The New Situation

As the events were unfolding, a novel situation was slowly emerging in Asia.

Many commentators became aware of the new state of affairs: *L'Aube*⁶³ wrote:

The invasion of Tibet by the troops of Mao Zedong opened a new chapter in the history of this country which, since more than 100 years, is the stake in Russian, British and Chinese intrigues.

Indeed, a new chapter for Tibet and a new chapter for India too. Nehru who was on centre stage, admitted in a note⁶⁴ that Tibet had enjoyed an autonomy 'verging on independence', though he said that he did not know what could be done to save Tibet. Finally he decided to watch and see and do nothing, while the rest of the world was waiting for the champion of the cause of the 'oppressed' nations to react. No reaction ever came.

The Indian Prime Minister ominously concluded his note: "*Tibet can not be saved*".

*L'Aurore*⁶⁵ seized the implications of the new situation and noted:

Too Late Mr Nehru!

Today, Mr. Nehru realizes his mistake and accuses the Chinese of bad faith and his own ambassador in Peking of clumsiness (he will most probably be recalled), but it is too late. In fact the chances to see the four

Chinese divisions with 60000 well trained soldiers stopped by the Tibetan troops is nil.

Unfortunately for the Tibetans, Panikkar who was called by many "the Indian Ambassador for China", was not recalled for another two years. He had the time to 'complete' his task. His last action would be to downgrade the Indian Mission in Lhasa to the level of a Consulate General, paving the way for the Panchsheel Agreement in 1954 and signalling the end of Tibet as a sovereign nation.

An article in *Combat*⁶⁶ reminded its readers that the Indian government's view was not favoured by the public of India.

But if one looks for an image of the true Indian public opinion, one will find it more in the widely circulated newspaper "The Hindustan Times" which is asking this question: "Has the Chinese Government decided to slap their friends for smashing their enemies?"

The Congress government in India took twelve more years (till the Chinese attack on NEFA⁶⁷ in 1962) to understand the feelings of the common people.

L'Aurore was not very optimistic on the outcome of future negotiations:

One cannot base any great hope on the diplomatic help that Lhasa is demanding from India, or from the peaceful negotiations that a Tibetan delegation would like to continue in Peking.

An interesting article in *Combat*⁶⁸ quotes from André Guilbaud who had been one of the few French explorers to visit the areas of eastern Tibet which had just been 'liberated' by the communist troops. In 1941, he wrote that while the world was getting smaller everywhere and space and time did not have the same meaning anymore, Tibet continued to measure distances in walking days and remained very far from a more and more stress-ridden world, Tibet was unchanged, living in its timeless values. But Guilbaud warned in 1941 that it might not last forever.

Tibet, though protected by high mountains and boreal climate, has escaped for a few more years to tragic solidarity of other peoples; it is improbable that this anachronism will last very long. Already men with bizarre occupation⁶⁹, armed with small wooden pegs and surveying

igequipment have penetrated on its territory, and following them, roads have encroached on the land of the lamas and fields have been levelled for landing facilities.

Tibetans do not know what are those wooden pegs that Chinese engineers are planting to mark their path.

They do not know that they are the first signs of the vanishing of a very old past which is now on the death row. Will this past be replaced by something better?

Time is certainly not too far away when it will be possible to enter Tibet by car or by plane. Then the lamaist civilization will die. Perhaps I would be one of the last men to have known this very old age of humanity.

*L'Aube*⁷⁰ pointed out another factor: Tibet had a Friendship Treaty with Nepal:

It is why the government of Lhasa had sent a mission to the Maharaja of Nepal, in order to invoke Article 2 of the Friendship Treaty signed by this state and Tibet in 1856. According to this article, the maharajah, today absconding was supposed to provide help and assistance to Tibet in case of aggression by a third party.

One could have thought that the famous Gorkhas of Nepal who used to be the jewel of the British Indian army would go and defend the Tibetan borders. Nothing like that happened, Pandit Nehru merely sent a protest note to the Peking government.

It was true that Nepal had a Treaty of Friendship with Tibet and it appeared that in Nepal many were inclined to respect the clauses of the Treaty and to send some troops to Tibet. I was told that 500 troops were promised to the Lhasa Government, but ultimately Nehru's Government intervened and refused the Nepalese permission to try to rescue the Tibetan army. It should be mentioned that during those weeks of October 1950, there was a lot of internal disturbances in Nepal and King Tribhuvan had to take refuge for some time in the Indian embassy until his dispute with the Rana Prime Minister was solved. This is probably why the correspondent speaks of the 'absconding' King. During the crisis, the Indian Ambassador sided with the King in the dispute. It is a fact that most of Nepalese politicians were more concerned by the situation in Kathmandu than by the happenings in Lhasa.

The Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama

One of the main topics which bothered the French Press in November 1950 was the relationship between the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, *Le Franc-Tireur* summed up the general perception, with its title "A 14 year-old Lama of 14 against one of 16."

Actually, the wide coverage given in the world press to the so-called enmity between the two young lamas, can be seen as a great success of Chinese propaganda. The Chinese, like their big brothers in Moscow, were masters in this art, while Tibetans were less than novices. We have seen earlier that they did not even know how to announce to the world that their country had been invaded.

It is clear that for leaders like Mao Zedong or Stalin, war against the imperialists or a 'liberation war' was a protracted struggle and for the final victory all available means had to be used. Propaganda was one of the most efficient tools.

For example, having the young Panchen Lama in their hands in Beijing was a trump card which the Chinese played very well. I have earlier quoted from a secret meeting between Stalin and Mao in December 1949 in Moscow. The minutes of the same meeting show the importance attached by the two dictators to a well-planned propaganda campaign to prepare the ground for a protracted struggle. The discussion was about taking back Formosa and bringing the revolution to South-east Asia.

Comrade Stalin: One could select a company of landing forces, train them in propaganda, send them over to Formosa, and through them organize an uprising on the isle.

Comrade Mao Zedong: Our troops have approached the borders of Burma and Indo-China. As a result, the Americans and the British are alarmed, not knowing whether we will cross the border or whether our troops will halt their movement.

Comrade Stalin: One could create a rumor that you are preparing to cross the border and in this way frighten the imperialists a bit.⁷¹

The entire story of the rivalry between the young lamas emanated mainly from Beijing.

The young Panchen Lama was born near Sinning, in Chinghai province at the Sino-Tibetan border. He was one of the candidates for recognition as the Ninth Panchen Lama.

The communists' use of the 'Panchen Lama card' began very early. On October 1, 1949, Mao and Zu Teh received telegrams of congratulation supposedly sent by the 11 year old Panchen Lama:

With superior wisdom and courage Your Excellencies have completed the grand salvation of the country and the people. The success of your army has brought joy to the whole country. ...Fortunately under the leadership of Your Excellencies, the North West has now been liberated. All those who are conscientious applaud with one accord. From now on, the realisation of the democratic happiness of the people and revival of the country are only a question of time and it will not be long before Tibet is liberated.⁷²

Nobody knows if the young lad had ever seen the telegram, but the fact is that it was widely circulated in the West through the Xinhua News agency.

In 1950, the Panchen Lama had not yet been officially recognized by the Tibetan government. Three candidates had been pre-selected for the post, out of which two were more favoured -- being a boy born in Sinning, the border town between Tibet and China and another one from Lhasa known as the 'Kundeling candidate'. The communist Chinese had begun grooming the Sinning candidate soon after his birth. Eventually, he was recognized in a 'package deal' when the 17-Point agreement was signed in May 1951. By that time, the Lhasa government had no choice but to accept Beijing's view. However, it should be mentioned that this Panchen Lama later became one of the greatest Tibetan patriots and later spent more than 18 years in 'rehabilitation' and in detention in China.

*La Tribune de Genève*⁷³ commented:

...The imperialists of new China did not waste time in finding the reincarnation of the eternal light [Opagme] in a young adolescent monk in Kumbum, the city with 10000 images. Thus it is in his name that the

people's army will present themselves to the Government in Lhasa, whose leader is the Thale Lama [Dalai Lama].

While *L'Aurore* wrote:

The Chinese have a good ace in their hand: if the Dalai Lama, who incarnated the temporal power, is against them, they have taken care to have on their side the support of the Panchen Lama who incarnates the spiritual and moral power and who traditionally is the mortal enemy of the Dalai Lama.

It is far from the truth that the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama have always been 'mortal enemies'. On the contrary, life after life they have been guru and disciple to each other: whoever was born first would be a teacher for the other. The rumour of rivalry originated only in the 1920's when differences between the entourages of the two lamas triggered a lot of tension in Tibet and forced the previous Panchen Lama (the 8th) to go on a 'pilgrimage of convenience' to Mongolia and China.

Even a serious paper like *La Gazette de Lausanne*⁷⁴ reported:

Thanks to the support of the Panchen Lama, the Chinese can find allies in the heart of the country that they are invading because the predecessor of this Lama counted quite a few partisans when he was chased out of Tibet.

The communist paper *Le Soir*⁷⁵ saw things from class-struggle perspective:

And it is through this kid [the Dalai Lama], buried alive in the mummy-like bandage of out-dated rituals, that the feudal lamas are able to impose their politics of oppression and terror.

And about the Panchen Lama: "A refugee in the province of Chinghai, his sympathy for the government of Mao Zedong makes him the hope for hundred of thousands of oppressed Tibetans."

*La Croix*⁷⁶ was more balanced in its commented and its description of both the situation and the people.

The invasion of Tibet by the communist Chinese put the spotlight on two curious personalities: the temporal and spiritual leaders of the country: the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama.

The Panchen Lama is the highest incarnate lama after the Dalai Lama.

Some Tibetans believe that the Panchen Lama is the spiritual equivalent of the Dalai Lama.

Many incarnations of the Panchen Lama have been discovered (some claim that the number of candidates had reached one hundred). These candidates have been reduced to three, including the Kumbum's one who is today 13 years old and under the protection of the communists since the take over by the troops of Mao Zedong of the province of Chinghai. Here again, Beijing's propaganda tried to show the Panchen Lama as the spiritual leader while the Dalai Lama was only the temporal leader. On the other hand quite a relatively correct description of the young Dalai Lama is given by *Le Franc-Tireur*⁷⁷ which quoted someone as having met the young incarnation.

The new ruler was installed in 1940... a really bad year to begin a new regime.

...All agreed to describe the young boy with a wide awake face, with a sharp spirit. Without any doubt he looked very superior in intelligence and in knowledge for his age. Most of those who had been granted an audience have kept an extraordinary memory of this child.

... Not for one second, the son of the farmer from Kumbum seemed shy to be there: he showed a remarkable ease, without the arrogance of the *parvenu*, on the contrary he was doing it with good grace and kind gentleness. His adventure seemed very natural and without any difficulties.

... People around him would love him, even if he was not god: he has such a way to take interest in everything and everybody!

...Mechanical toys are of particular interest to him.

... [After becoming] a province of communist China, Tibet will perhaps keep its Dalai Lama...but it will only be a religious symbol who will be respected in as much he will accept to support the new regime without ulterior motives.

*Le Parisien Libéré*⁷⁸ pointed out another aspect of the political life in Tibet, when it told its readers:

This allows the sharp tongues to pretend that the Dalai Lama 'disappears' sometimes, at the right time whenever he shows too quick tendencies to emancipate himself from the regent.

This statement would be quite true if the name of the Regent was replaced by the one of the Amban, the Chinese Representative of the Manchu court in Lhasa. The 19th century saw five Dalai Lamas following each other in a quick succession, not a single one being able to reign.

*L'Aube*⁷⁹ went in the same general direction: considering the Panchen Lama to be the main Tibetan leader.

The superior of the Tashilhoupou convent, the Panchen Lama is the true chief of the country: he is in charge of the political and spiritual affairs.

There is thus a constant rivalry between the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama and the Chinese communists have very cleverly used this fact.

*La Tribune de Genève*⁸⁰ found historical explanations in the superiority of the Panchen Lama over the Dalai Lama in the 'shamamist graft' [Buddhism] on the Ling Kesar's cult, it also emphasized on the Chinese policy to divide to rule:

The graft of a shamanist religion [Buddhism], diverse in its rituals and its thought and giving occasion for philosophical disputes in the diverse lamaseries of the country.

... The policy of the new China vis-à-vis Tibet is very clever and skilful. It exploits for the benefit of Mao Zedong the old rivalry between the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama.

Some Conclusions

In conclusion it is worth underlining some interesting facts which emerge while reading through the press articles of October/November 1950.

The first and the most important is that the Roof of the World was another world. Tibet remained isolated, living in its solitary splendour and had no contact with the revolutionary changes outside. The Tibetan public hardly knew that India had become independent, China had won the civil war against the Nationalists after having thrown out the Japanese forces, that a new resurgent Asia (and Africa) was living through a turbulent period. In Tibet, the prayer

wheels continued their timeless circles. Before the end of the forties, Tibet had not been touched by anything outside its Buddhist sphere.

This is probably the reason why, the present Dalai Lama has said several times that by refusing to look outside and learn from the outside during the past century Tibet accumulated a very 'negative' Karma

Another fact is that in spite of the conservative attitude of the big monasteries, the intrigues between the aristocratic families and the social disparities in the society, Tibet remained a relatively harmonious society. This does appear in the writings of missionaries or adventurers (like Alexandra David-Neel, Jacques Bacot or André Guibaut) who had visited Tibet in the early part of the 20th century.

However the most striking characteristic of the articles is that the political, social and religious life inside Tibet remained unknown to the outside world. Even the best-informed press persons knew very little or nothing of the life of Tibet.⁸¹ In these circumstances, it is not surprising that the communist Chinese managed to wage their propaganda war on a large scale without contradiction from any quarter.

The first to fall into their propaganda net was the Government of Nehru who soon believed that the "lama hierarchy" as Nehru called it, had to be 'reformed'.

From 'reform' to 'liberation' the distance was not too far and in a few weeks the 'liberation' of Tibet was accepted by the Indian government. Nehru. The Indian Prime Minister thought that a small dose of socialism could only be good for the backward Tibetans.

The western governments who had entered in a war in the Korean peninsula on the same day of October 1950, were happy to follow suit and accept that nothing could be done to save the Roof of the World.

In a report recently published about the Kargil war in 1999, the review Committee has pointed out the importance of managing the media. It is clear that in 1950, the Tibetans had absolutely no clue how to fight such a battle. Presuming that they were not able to militarily defend themselves, they should have been able to explain what was happening to the world. Unfortunately, they did not perceive the usefulness of the exercise and took no action in that

direction; this emerges clearly in the articles. The case of the Panchen Lama and the propaganda engineered from Beijing shows how helpless they were in this matter.

During the weeks following the invasion, the events went so fast that the Tibetans had no chance to retrieve the irretrievable. Fifty years later, one can again ask "what are the chances to undo what was done in 1950"?

¹ I am grateful to Stéphanie Duncan of *France Inter* ("2000 Ans d'Histoire") for having dug out most of the articles from the archives of *Radio France*.

² See *"Tibet, le pays sacrifié"*, Ed Calmann-lévy, 2000. In English *"The Fate of Tibet"*, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1999.

³ Though in the case of Tibet, papers like *The Statesman* in Calcutta was often closer to the true information.

⁴ K. Dhondup, *The Water Bird and Other Years*, Rangwang Publishers, New Delhi, 1996, p. 143.

⁵ The Kashag had begun to understand. In an interesting document, a copy of which is in our possession, the Kashag sent a letter the Prime Minister of Siam. The Tibetan Cabinet was announcing the nomination of a delegation led by Shakabpa: *"In view of the World wide spread of Communism which is the enemy of our religion, so dear to us that we all Buddhists look upon our religion as the most precious of all our possessions, which is more dear to us than our very hearts; and also the fact that Communist troops have invaded the Chinese Provinces of Sinkiang, Chinghai and Shikang which are situated on the borders of Tibet."*

We do not know if this letter (Coll. Jean Lassale) was ever delivered, but the fact that it was written shows that Lhasa was slowly becoming aware of the international situation.

⁶ *Le Parisien Libéré*, 28 October 1950, *Le pays le plus mystérieux du monde gouverné par un dieu enfant* (Tibet, the most mysterious country in the world, led by a child).

⁷ *Le Parisien Libéré*, 28 October 1950.

⁸ One often forgets that the British have been responsible, in modern history, for many of the miseries faced today by the Tibetan nation.

⁹ Chiang Kai-shek was very eager to see Tibet and Mongolia 'return to the fold' of the Chinese empire. In 1928, emboldened by the presence of the Panchen Lama in China, the Chinese government decided to form the new province of Sikang which included large parts of Kham, and of Qinghai with large parts of Amdo.

These were officially declared provinces of China, even though the Chinese government could not immediately assume administrative power due to the rivalries between different local warlords.

¹⁰ Ladakh, though culturally close to Tibet was politically never part of Tibet.

¹¹ And then against India, showing large parts of North India, as Chinese territory.

¹² *Gazette de Lausanne*, 8 November 1950, *Pour pénétrer au Tibet les communistes ont du passer par d'étroits sentiers de montagnes* (To reach Tibet, communists had to go through narrow mountain paths).

¹³ *Le Matin*, 2 November 1950, *Pourquoi les Chinois envahissent-ils le Tibet?* (Why are the Chinese invading Tibet?)

¹⁴ It has been pointed out that 1949, not 1950, should be considered as the year Tibet was invaded by China. Though it is true that the Chinese troops entered the province of Amdo in September 1949, it was not a massive attack as in the case of Kham province where 40,000 troops had been massed for months in anticipation of the invasion. In the case of Amdo, there was no resistance to the Chinese penetration and some Tibetans such as Geshe Sherab Gyatso even helped the Chinese to 'liberate' the province. For the world press it is clear that the invasion occurred in October 1950.

¹⁵ The State Department and the British Foreign Office tried very hard to send a covert delegation to Tibet in 1949 and in the first months of 1950, but Nehru's government did not give the necessary permission. Tibet was India's monopoly.

¹⁶ Collection Jean Lassale, Paris.

¹⁷ Ford Robert, *Captured in Tibet*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 115.

¹⁸ *Le Figaro*, 26 October 1950, *Les Troupes communistes seraient en marche vers le Tibet*. (The Chinese troops are reported to advance towards Tibet).

¹⁹ *The Hindu*, Madras

²⁰ *L'Humanité*, 28 Octobre 1950, L'Armée Populaire Chinoise a reçu l'ordre d'avancer à l'intérieur du Tibet (The Chinese People's army has received the order to advance inside Tibet).

²¹ *La Croix*, 28 October-1950, *Les Tibétains défendent désespérément la route qui mène à Lhasa* (Tibetans hopelessly defend the road leading to Lhasa)

²² *L'Humanité*, 30 October 1950, *Le Journal Soviétique 'Troud' dénonce les visées anglo-américaines sur le Tibet* (The Soviet Newspaper *Troud* denounces the designs of the Anglo-Americans on Tibet).

²³ They were mere mouth pieces of their masters and never tried to independently assess the situation It still continues today.

²⁴ Ling Nai-Min, *Tibetan Sourcebook* (Hong Kong: Union Research Institute, 1964).

²⁵ *Le Figaro*, 28 October 1950, "*L'Invasion du Tibet par les communistes chinois serait une grave faute politique*" (The invasion of Tibet by the Chinese communists would be a grave political miscalculation).

²⁶ Which was Nehru's India.

²⁷ *Le Parisien Libéré*, 28 October 1950.

²⁸ *Le Soir*, 11 November 1950. *Lhasa la ville des 20000 prêtres n'était pas interdite pour tout le monde* (Lhasa, the city with 20000 priests was not forbidden to all).

²⁹ *Le Parisien Libéré*, 28 October 1950.

³⁰ Addressed to the Foreign Bureau, Government of Tibet, Lhasa. Once more it proves that Tibet had a more or less independent status even in the first months of 1950.

³¹ Letter Coll. Jean Lassale.

³² Lowell Thomas is an exception.

³³ *La Tribune de Genève*, 4 November 1950, *Les origines de la rivalité entre Dalai-lama et le Panchen Rimpoche* (The origins of the rivalry between the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama).

³⁴ A few years later, Nehru, the Indian Prime Minister repeated the same argument in the Indian Parliament when it was discovered that the Chinese had built a road through Indian territory in Ladakh (Aksai Chin).

³⁵ *Le Parisien Libéré*, 28 October 1950.

³⁶ Scorsese shot the film "*Kundun*".

³⁷ *La Gazette de Lausanne*, 8 November 1950, *Pour pénétrer au Tibet les communistes ont du passer par d'étroits sentiers de montagnes*. (To penetrate Tibet, the Chinese had to go through narrow mountain paths).

³⁸ *Le Journal de Genève*, 1 November 1950, *Tempête sur l'Himalaya* (Storm over the Himalayas).

³⁹ The Simla Convention was a valid Treaty between India and Tibet in 1950.

⁴⁰ *Le Journal de Genève*, 1 November 1950.

⁴¹ *Combat*, 3 November 1950, "*Le Viol du Pays des Prières*" (The Rape of the Land of Prayers).

⁴² *Cold War International History Project*, Woodrow Wilson International Centre History Project, available on the internet <http://www.cwihp.si.edu/>

⁴³ *Le Franc-Tireur*, 30 October 1950, *Le Tibet en appelle à Nehru et à l'ONU* (Tibet appeal to Nehru and the UN).

⁴⁴ *Le Matin*, 2 November 1950.

⁴⁵ *Combat*, 3 November 1950.

⁴⁶ *Le Soir*, 11 November 1950.

⁴⁷ *L'Aurore*, 31 October 1950, "*Les Chinois sont à 250 km de Lhasa*" (The Chinese have reached 350 km from Lhasa).

⁴⁸ Which were now to shift to Beijing.

⁴⁹ *L'Aube*, 10 November 1950, *Le Tibet nouvelle victime de la 5ème colonne* (Tibet the new victim of the fifth column).

⁵⁰ Heinrich Harrer, *Seven Years in Tibet* (London: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 235.

⁵¹ *Le Soir*, 11 November 1950.

-
- ⁵² *Le Parisien Libéré*, 28 October 1950.
- ⁵³ An Indian delegation led by Harishwar Dayal, the Political Officer in Sikkim went for two months to Lhasa at the end of 1949 to discuss the Tibetan requirements.
- ⁵⁴ *Le Franc-Tireur*, 30 October 1950.
- ⁵⁵ *L'Aube*, 10 November 1950.
- ⁵⁶ *Le France-Tireur*, 6 November 1950, *Cet enfant sur un trône est un dieu mais le restera-t-il longtemps?* (This child on a throne is a god, but will he remain so for long).
- ⁵⁷ *L'Aube*, 10 November 1950
- ⁵⁸ *Le France-Tireur*, 6 November 1950.
- ⁵⁹ Outer Tibet according to Simla Convention.
- ⁶⁰ SWJN, Series II, Vol. 15 (1), p. 437. Cable from Jawaharlal Nehru to Pannikar dated October 22.
- ⁶¹ *Combat*, 1 November 1950, *Mao Tse Toung à Nehru "La question tibétaine est purement chinoise"* (Mao Tse Tung to Nehru: "The Tibetan question is purely Chinese")
- ⁶² 31 October 1950, *Les Chinois sont à 250 km de Lhasa* (The Chinese are 250 km away from Lhasa)
- ⁶³ *L'Aube*, 10 November 1950.
- ⁶⁴ SWJN, Series II, Vol. 15 (2) p. 345. Policy Regarding Tibet, note dated 18 November 1950.
- ⁶⁵ *L'Aurore*, 31 October 1950.
- ⁶⁶ *Combat*, 1 November 1950.
- ⁶⁷ North East Frontier Agency, far-eastern province of India.
- ⁶⁸ 2 November 1950, *"A Licho où le Poisson est sacré"* (In Lisho where the fish is sacred)
- ⁶⁹ The Chinese had started surveying the roads in Eastern Tibet.
- ⁷⁰ *L'Aube*, 10 November 1950.
- ⁷¹ Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Centre History Project, available on the internet <http://www.cwihp.si.edu/>

⁷² Dispatch from Nanking to British Foreign Office, 27 December 1949, (FO371/83325).

⁷³ *La Tribune de Genève*, 4 November 1950.

⁷⁴ 8 November 1950, *Pour pénétrer au Tibet les communistes ont dû passer par d'étroits sentiers de montagnes*. (To penetrate in Tibet, communist troops had to go through narrow mountain paths).

⁷⁵ *Le Soir*, 11 November 1950.

⁷⁶ *La Croix*, 4 November 1950, *Le Dalai Lama et le Panchen Lama*, (The Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama)

⁷⁷ *Le Franc-Tireur*, 6 November 1950.

⁷⁸ *Le Parisien Libéré*, 28 October 1950.

⁷⁹ *L'Aube*, 10 November 1950.

⁸⁰ *La Tribune de Genève*, 4 November 1950.

⁸¹ Except perhaps of the Governments of India and Great Britain which to some extent had access to information through their Missions in Lhasa.