

A no-win situation for Tibet¹

A few years ago on a visit to France, I came across a large number of newspaper articles written just after Mao Zedong's People's Liberation Army invaded Tibet in October 1950.

It was fascinating to go through these clippings and an eye opener to discover what impressions and perspectives senior correspondents and Tibet 'experts' viewed the Land of Snows at this crucial time of Tibetan history.

One of the issues touched upon by the French press during this period (between October 25 and November 10, 1950) was: 'Is Tibet a Paradise?'

At the same time, the debate was raging in India: should India accept Tibet's invasion without a word?

In Parliament, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee suggested that India should strengthen her borders, especially in view of "the incorporation of Assam and Ladakh in the Chinese maps". He warned the House that it was clear from the Chinese notes sent to justify the invasion that "China will do everything necessary for the purpose of keeping intact what it considers to be China's border and when it refers to Chinese border, it includes Tibet as well and the 'undefined boundary' of Tibet so far as it touches Indian border."

Nehru remained philosophical; he said that there was a tremendous change in Asia. He could not say if it was good or bad; human values were not what they used to be: "I wonder whether anything of value in life will remain for sensitive individuals". He reminded the House that China was a big nation which could not be ignored. Ultimately, Nehru did not do anything, letting China 'liberate' the Roof of the World.

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To come back to my clippings, I came across several odd descriptions of Tibet, but one of the strangest was in an article in *Combat*, a newspaper founded during the WWII by the French resistance.

It explained to its readers that the invasion of Tibet was not an ordinary invasion, there was something more behind it: "for the lovers of signs and occult connections, the invasion of Tibet by the Chinese troops takes a particularly important meaning."

The journalist expounded his 'inner' theory about the remnants of the Atlantis civilization: "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." That sounds surrealistic and was not of great help for the Tibetans.

Le Parisien Libéré resumed the situation more prosaically: "[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."

Many journalists concluded that with the invasion of Tibet, a world was disappearing: a world of wisdom living outside time and space.

A few 'leftist' newspapers dreamt of another myth; they believed that Communist China would bring a 'true 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 Communist *Le Soir* 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."

But for most of the authors/journalists Tibet was a paradise.

A French explorer André Guilbaud had however warned that the 'paradise' might not last forever: "Tibet, though protected by high mountains and boreal climate, has escaped [the fate] of other peoples; it is improbable that this anachronism will last very long."

Guilbaud spoke about "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."

Guilbaud probably did not foresee 15 million Han Chinese 'descending' on Lhasa every year.

Today, Tibet is on the way to become a 'paradise' again. This time it is not a mythic paradise, or a paradise for Han tourists, but a fiscal paradise.

According to Simon Rabinovitch of *The Financial Times* (FT) 'Tibet opens up as new domestic tax haven'.

The London newspaper explains: "Cayman Islands, step aside. Private equity funds looking to cut their tax bills have a new option some 3,600 metres above sea level at the foot of the Himalayas. The only catch is, they will be playing a role in China's strategy to tighten its grip on Tibet."

Lhoka Prefecture in Southern Tibet (north of Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh and Bhutan) has decided to offer great tax breaks and 'other sweeteners in an attempt to make itself a home for private equity funds and investment companies'.

The FT asserts that Lhoka is unusually aggressive: "The enticements for private equity funds to set up shop in Tibet are part of the Chinese government's push to develop the region's economy at the same time as establishing firmer control over it."

Wang Jinghe, a lawyer from Shanghai told the FT: "Many places throughout China, especially big cities like Beijing and Shanghai, have been offering preferential policies to private equity firms. But over the past year, lots more investors have been mentioning Tibet and talking about moving there".

Which Paradise should the Tibetans favour? The mythic paradise? The tourist paradise or the fiscal paradise? A no-win situation!

But that is not all, according to the statistics released by China's Development and Reform Commission, in the neighbouring Nyingchi Prefecture (also north of Arunachal), from January to June of 2013, about 347.7 million U.S. dollars have been invested in the key projects. It is a year-on-year growth of 115 %.

The 12th Five-Year Plan says that 129 projects amounting for 6.4 billion U.S. dollars will be taken up between 2011 and 2015 in the Prefecture; it includes 4.3 billion U.S dollars of planned investment.

A 'development' paradise at India's gate!