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The question of Tibet



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Issue: The question of Tibet

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Introduction

Sadly, a recurring theme in human history is the inability of humanity to agree on how we should govern ourselves. Although the United Nation's point of view on this subject may seem very clear and well defined, namely: "every people has the right to self determination", the words 'people' and 'self determination' leave a lot up to one's own impression. With Dictionary.com defining people as "the entire body of persons who constitute a community, tribe, nation, or other group by virtue of a common culture, history, religion" and self determination as "determination by oneself or itself, without outside influence", in practice the involved parties usually have a difficult time agreeing on whether a certain group of people may call themselves a people and exactly what level of autonomy suffices for self determination. A current form of this essential problem is the situation we see in Tibet. Whereas Tibetans definitely feel themselves Tibetan and therefore consider themselves as a people, the government of China uses various arguments and techniques to claim the Tibetans first and foremost are Chinese. The level of autonomy the region of Tibet has is another point of conflict. Add to this the political and economic interests China has in this mountainous region and we find ourselves in a tricky situation.



Figure 1 Tibet's Location. Digital image. Tibet Travel Planner. N.p., n.d. Web. 20 Aug. 2015. <<http://www.tibetravelplanner.com/mapsoftibet/location.htm>>

Definition of Key Terms

Dalai Lama

This is the spiritual leader of Tibet. Until the 29 of March 2011 he had the political authority of Tibet, too. Tibet is now ruled by a democratically elected leader.

Ganden Phodrang

This was the Tibetan government headed by the Dalai Lama until the 29th of March 2011. The authority lost their power when China invaded Tibet in 1950. The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) is the new version of this authority but has no power. The CTA is situated in India because they were exiled by the Chinese government. The aim of the CTA is to rehabilitate Tibetan refugees and to restore freedom and happiness in Tibet.

Autonomy

A country or a group of people is autonomous when it has the right to govern itself.

Theocracy

A state with a government in which God is the supreme civil ruler.

Vassal state

This is a state that is dependent of another state.

De facto independent state

A state that has autonomy although it is not recognized by law.

Separatism

To strive for separation of a larger group or state.

General Overview

Important historical events until 1950

The beginning of the conflict between China and Tibet has its roots in the thirteenth century. The hard part is figuring out what happened since then. China and Tibet are claiming a different position of the history of Tibet for their own interest. The People's



Republic of China (PRC) is claiming that Tibet has been a part of China since the Yuan dynasty. The Yuan dynasty ruled China from 1279 to 1368 and followed the Mongol empire. However, The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) is claiming that they were not a part of China. In their opinion, Tibet and China were both a part of the Mongol empire in the Yuan dynasty. They predicate that they were a part of the Mongol Empire which happened to include China too and so not a part of China. Furthermore they are stressing that they were a vassal state of the Mongol Empire and so they were equal. The Tibetans gave the Chinese emperors spiritual guidance. In return for this, they got protection of China. The relationship was not based on whether one state was or was not subordinate to the other. Both the parties are using a different history as an argument to say whether or not Tibet should be a part of China. There is no certainty of which story to believe.

Something we do know for sure is that Tibet and China had a stable connection because of their common beliefs regarding the Buddhism during the Yuan dynasty whether Tibet was a part of China or not. This was until the collapsing of the Qing dynasty. When it collapsed, Tibet declared its independence in 1913 because they felt that the new Chinese dynasty regarded them as a subordinate region and not as an equal part. They ruled themselves for 36 years until the People's Republic of China was founded. China did not intervene for the reason that it was having enough troubles with its own empire because of the Warlord era, civil war and World War II. Tibet's sovereignty was not recognized by the most countries and predecessor of the United Nations but was still regarded as a part of the Republic of China.

In 1914, representatives of China, Tibet and the Great Britain negotiated about the status of Tibet in Simla. A treaty was formed, wherein was stated that Tibet would be divided in *Inner* and *Outer Tibet*. Tibet would still be a part of China, but the Outer Tibet would be an autonomous region. The treaty failed because China didn't want to give a South part of Tibet to British India.

Tibet under the control of the People's Republic of China

After regarding Tibet as friends until 1913, China's natural urge to expand destroyed the friendly relationship between China and Tibet. After Tibet governed itself for 36 years, Tibet was willing to negotiate. However, during this negotiation in New Delhi, Tibet was invaded by the Chinese army. Tibet had been a de facto independent state until this. In 1951 a seventeen-point agreement was signed by the representatives of the Dalai Lama. In this agreement was stated that China would get the sovereignty of Tibet. The Chinese government uses this in their advantage to show that Tibet is a part of the Chinese territory.



However, the Central Tibetan Administration claims that it was signed under duress and therefor invalid. There is once again no proof about this.

The problem between these nations is not hard to describe. Although Tibet has been a part of China until 1913, they still do not consider themselves Chinese. They differ racially, culturally and geographically. Because of the dissatisfaction of the inhabitants of Tibet the Chinese government had to use violence to get and to keep sovereignty over Tibet. The oppression by the Chinese has led to protests and riots for example the one on the 10th of March 2008. The Chinese government used tear gas and cattle prods to quell the demonstrations.

At the beginning after the invasion of China in 1951, the culture of Tibet continued to function unchanged. But this changed soon. After some time the inhabitants of Tibet realized China wanted to change Tibet from a theocracy into a communistic and rebelled country to spread the communistic ideas. This caused the Tibetan Uprising in 1959. During this riot thousands Tibetans were killed. The Dalai Lama fled to India which helped China to keep control over the inhabitants because their leader was gone. This uprising is commemorated annually on the 10th of March, called the *Tibetan Uprising Day*.

This was not the only setback of Tibet during this time. The inhabitants also suffered from *The Great Leap Forward* of Mao Zedong. Mao Zedong was the leader of the communistic revolutionary in China and is regarded as the founding father of the People's Republic of China. Before Mao Zedong got the power the economy of China was based on farming. He wanted to transform the country with an agrarian economy into a socialist society through rapid collectivization and industrialization. This led to famine and starvation for the first time in history in Tibet.

The area that was under control of the Dalai Lama was renamed the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) by the Chinese government in 1965 to make it seem that they are autonomous

but actually they are not. Free Tibet used to be the provinces Amdo, Kham and U-Tsang. The Chinese government



Figure 2 Map of Tibet. Digital image. Free Tibet. N.p., n.d. Web. 20 Aug. 2015. <<http://freetibet.org/about/introduction-to-tibet>>.

renamed U-Tsang as the TAR and regards this as Tibet. The province Amdo was renamed Qinghai and the province Kham was incorporated into the Chinese provinces. The head of the government of the TAR would be an ethnic Tibetan, but the power was always of the First Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party who was never Tibetan.

The last riot which made the people through media again aware about the situation in Tibet was in March 2008. On the Tibet's Uprising commemoration monks demonstrated on the streets. This escalated to violent protests. The government of China accuses the Dalai Lama orchestrating these protests and says it was motivated by separatism. The Dalai Lama denies this and claims that they were caused by discontent.

Religious suppression

One of the reasons for dispute is the religious suppression in Tibet. The communist's beliefs of China are contrary to the beliefs of the Buddhism of Tibet. Thousands of monasteries in Tibet have been destroyed after the Chinese occupation. There is not only no freedom of religion, the Chinese government is also unwilling to negotiate with Tibet's exiled religious leader.

The introduction of secular education has infuriated many Tibetans. Secular education means that there is no religion involved in the lessons. The Buddhism used to be involved in the lessons but because of this it is not allowed anymore to teach the children about the religion. They think China wants to attempt the extermination of religion and culture.

Human rights violation

Many violations of human rights have been committed in Tibet by the Chinese state. In Tibet there is no freedom of religion, belief and association. Also the media of Tibet is tightly controlled by the Chinese government. Because of this it is difficult to determine the abuses of the human rights of the Chinese government. The Chinese government has even been accused of the crime of genocide in Tibet by the Committee to Support Tibet but according to a report of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) there was no sufficient proof.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Central Tibetan Administration (CTA)



Tibet was not always a part of China. Tibet ruled itself from 1913 to 1950. The Tibetans do not feel that they belong to China because of their contradictive views regarding religion and politics. While they are maintaining to their Buddhist beliefs, China wants to make Tibet communistic. Sadly, in the Chinese attempts to transfer this communism to Tibet the Chinese government used violence.

On the other hand, being a vassal state of China will benefit Tibet because of the fast growing economy of China. And something that may not be forgotten is that Tibet has no army and so is unable to defend or maintain itself.

People's Republic of China (PRC)

China has always wanted to incorporate Tibet for various reasons. One of them is the resources in Tibet. The Himalayan Mountains in Tibet is rich in silver, lead, zinc, lithium and other raw materials used in consumer products and have copper and gold deposits that are worth one trillion dollars. Tibet also has the biggest uranium reserve on earth. More than 2 million Tibetans had to leave their home for the Chinese exploitation. They had to find another place to live.

Another reason for China to have the power over Tibet is that Tibet has a good strategic military position. When an unlikely attack comes from the west, Tibet's position could help defending the People's Republic of China. Indeed, it is situated on a high plateau, with a view to Bhutan and Myanmar.

Moreover, if China loses Tibet, there is a high chance that other parts of their country, for example Taiwan, want their independence, too. China exists of many different peoples who do not feel that they are Chinese. So these peoples will want their independence, too. This could lead to more protests and violence.

United States

The United States has not really been a part of this conflict. However, it did help with defending Tibet through sending the CIA to Tibet in the 1950's and 1960's. The CIA trained troops because they wanted to destabilize Communist China. It was stopped because the US lost his interest in playing a concerted party.

Timeline of Events



| Date | Description of event |
|--------------------|--|
| Thirteenth century | Contemporary religious and political disputes start, after China claims Tibet has been an inalienable part of China under the Yuan dynasty |
| 1903-1904 | Tibet invaded by the British Empire |
| 1913 | Tibet declared independence |
| July 2, 1914 | Simla treaty was signed |
| October 1, 1949 | People's Republic of China was founded |
| October 7, 1950 | Tibet invaded by China |
| March 23, 1951 | Seventeen-point agreement |
| March 10, 1959 | Tibetan Uprising |
| 1960-1962 | Great Leap Forward led to famine |
| March 10, 2008 | Tibetan protests |
| May 29, 2011 | End of political power Dalai Lama |

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

There is not much UN involvement in this respect mainly due to China's veto power, but resolutions have been written stating that Tibet deserves its autonomy.

- Simla Convention, 1914
- Seventeen-point agreement, 1951
- Appeal by His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet to the United Nations, 11 November 1950, UN document A11549
- Question of Tibet, 20 December 1961 (**A/RES/1723(XVI)**)
- Dalai Lama XIV, 5 Point Peace Plan Presentation to U.S. Congress, 21 September 1987

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The 14th Dalai Lama has tried to resolve the issue with setting up a Five-Point Peace Plan. It asked for;

“1. Transformation of the whole of Tibet into a zone of peace;

2. Abandonment of China's population transfer policy which threatens the very existence of the Tibetans as a people;
3. Respect for the Tibetan people's fundamental human rights and democratic freedoms;
4. Restoration and protection of Tibet's natural environment and the abandonment of China's use of Tibet for the production of nuclear weapons and dumping of nuclear waste;
5. Commencement of earnest negotiations on the future status of Tibet and of relations between the Tibetan and the Chinese peoples."

The Dalai Lama has tried several times to negotiate with the China, but all of them were refused. The one time did not refuse; they still invaded Tibet during the negotiation in 1951. Since that Tibet has been ruled by the Chinese government. They also refused to consider the plan of the Dalai Lama.

There is a lack of agreement from both sides. However, progress has been made on the latest meetings in 2002, 2004 and 2006. Lodi Gyari, the head of the Tibetan's delegation, said there is better understanding of each other's position. The Chinese government still does not trust the Tibetan's delegation because the Chinese government think they are seeking for independence although the Tibetan's delegation has emphasized they are not.

Possible Solutions

A solution is necessary that ensures Tibet will get more influence in their own government and has freedom of religion and beliefs. China does not respect the values of Tibet and therefor does not deserve the control over Tibet. If China will lose Tibet, more parts will try to get independence, such as Taiwan. The People's Republic of China exists of many other small peoples that have not always been a part of China, too. For any solution to be morally acceptable, it is an idea for the Chinese government to give the Tibetan's government, the Central Tibetan Administration, more influence in Tibet. Sadly, this will not happen until there is more trust. Like the American athlete Arthur Ashe said: "Trust has to be earned, and should come only after the passage of time." This trust can be built through for example organizing more meetings and peace talks between the Chinese government and the Tibetan delegation. It could be an idea to have a third party involved to increase the effectiveness of these meetings and peace talks.



The Tibetan inhabitants feel that the Chinese government does not respect the culture and religion in Tibet. For peace and more acceptance of China, the Chinese government can do a much better job of preserving the Tibetan culture. For example through restore the Tibetan language as an official language of Tibet's governments, restriction on the number of monks is allowed in a given monastery should be lifted and let the parents of the children chose whether or not they want to have their children on a school where Buddhism is involved.

The violation of human rights is also something that cannot continue. Action should be taken to prevent the further violation of the Human Rights by China. It is hard to end this because there is no proof that China even violated human rights according to the ICJ. However, it could be possible to provide education for the Tibetans which will help protecting themselves.

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Appendices

Appendix I

Seventeen point agreement, 1950:

<http://www.tibetjustice.org/materials/china/china3.html>

Appendix II

International Campaign for Tibet. Web.

<https://www.savetibet.org/>

Appendix III

Current information about the conflict from the Human Rights Watch:

<https://www.hrw.org/asia/china-and-tibet>

