



Tibet and China: An Historical Overview

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Abstract

This article seeks to provide an historical overview of Sino-Tibet relationship right since the time when the Tibetans first came into contact with the Chinese. This is significant in order to appreciate the nature of controversy surrounding the past and present status of Tibet. While China claims that Tibet is an inalienable part of its territory, Tibetans reiterate that Tibet has historically been an independent state. The article further shows that despite witnessing highs and lows, the nature of relationship between the two is essentially marred by mutual suspicion and enmity. It also tries to account for the invasion of Tibet by China in 1950.

Keywords: *Tibet, China, Independence*

The Chinese government wants me to say that for many centuries Tibet has been part of China. Even if I make that statement, many people would just laugh. And my statement would not change past History. History is History.”

His Holiness Dalai Lama

It was in the year 641 A.D. that the first recorded contact of people from the two regions had occurred. This came about in the form of marital alliance when the then Chinese princess Wencheng had married the Tibetan prince Songstam Gampo. This is often cited by the Chinese authority as the beginning of a new relationship between the China and Tibet, “Wencheng’s arrival in Tibet began the process of civilization of the Tibetans and their cultural and political assimilation to China” (Smith 1996: 63). Soon after the death of Songstam Gampo in 650 A.D., China made its first claim over Tibet by attacking it and by taking over Lhasa.

The Age of the Tibetan Empire

In 8th century, the Tibetans and Tang Dynasty fought with one another and Tibetans captured the Tang capital. This was followed by the signing of an agreement in 822 A.D. between Tibet and Tang Dynasty. The agreement underscored that the “Tibetans shall be happy in Tibet and Chinese happy in China and the great kingdom united will never be changed” (Smith 1996: 73). After the death of last Tibetan king, Trisong Detsen in 838A.D, Tibet fragmented into small number of independent states and no single state was able to unite all the Tibetan people. Given all this, there was no single monk in Tibet who could wield power over others. As a matter of fact, each state had its own monk who wanted to capture more power than others. The first empire which took advantage of such a state of affairs was the Mongol empire.

Mongol Empire

This was the first time when Tibet came under the Mongol empire but not under the Chinese. They did not directly rule over Tibet. Tibetan leader of Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism concluded an agreement with the Mongol ruler in order to avoid inevitable conquest of Tibet. This special relationship is known as *Choyon*.¹ This relationship further strengthened when Kublai Khan conquered China and invited Sakya Lama to become a religious preceptor of his empire. Since both China and Tibet were ruled by the Mongol, the idea of claiming Tibet as a part of China appeared absurd. However, no evidence exists regarding Chinese control over Tibet administration during the Mongol period.

Manchu Empire

After Mongol empire Manchu empire come to power. The legacy of the *Choyon* relationship continued in Tibet during this phase as well. This was done because the Manchu rulers knew that the Mongol regime had left a deep impact on Tibet. Since the Mongol had given everything to Tibet, the Manchus did not need to worry about anything. But with the establishment of the position of Panchen Lama by the Dalai Lama, the *Choyon* relationship came to an end. It made it practically impossible for the Dalai Lama to control the whole of Tibet since the power was now divided between him and Panchen Lama. Taking advantage of this, the Chinese government pitted Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama against each other with a view to gaining complete control over Tibet.

¹ Choyon means priest-patron relation.

Some interesting developments took place in the wake of the death of 5th Dalai Lama in 1682. The Tibetan administration concealed the news of his death from the outside world by creating a false story that he had slipped into deep meditation. This was followed by a refusal by the 6th Dalai Lama to take Buddhist vows when it came onto him to take the mantle of running the Tibetan administration. This marked the beginning of the Chinese interference in the internal affair of Tibet.

Ghurkhas Invasion

The *amban*² system of administration was introduced by the Chinese after the death of the 6th Dalai Lama. This allowed the Dalai Lama and *amban* to jointly rule over Tibet. With the assumption of office by the 8th Dalai Lama, the relationship between Tibet and Nepal came to be characterised by mutual distrust and constant tension. Gurkhas had entered Tibet in 1788 and in 1799. Now the *amban* not only came to oversee the Tibetans affair, but also started controlling the Tibetans frontier. The Gurkhas attacked Tibet once again in 1855, but this time China refused to bail it out. Moreover, a treaty was imposed on Tibet which forced it to pay regular tribute to Gurkhas.

The defeat suffered by China at the hands of the Japanese forces in 1895 led to a new realisation in Tibet China perhaps would no longer be able to protect Tibetan interests. As noted by Smith, “The Tibetans thought of Russia as an imperial power capable of protecting Tibet against both the Chinese and British” (1996: 155).

Lhasa Convention

Lhasa convention was signed in 1904 because Britain wanted to control over Tibet. A treaty was imposed which required Tibet to open its border with British India, to allow British and Indian traders to travel freely, not to impose custom duties on trade with India, a demand from the British that Lhasa has to pay 2.5 million rupees as indemnity and not to enter into relations with any foreign power without British approval.³ Sino-British treaty was signed in 1906 by which the “Government of Great Britain engages not to annex Tibetan territory or to interfere in the administration of Tibet.”⁴ In 1907 Britain and Russia agreed that in “conformity with the admitted principle of the suzerainty of China over Tibet” both nations “engage not to enter into negotiation with Tibet except through the intermediary of the Chinese government.

² Amban is a Manchu word meaning "high official," which corresponds to a number of different official titles in the Qing imperial government.

³This information has been taken from an article titled “History of Tibet” available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/history_of_Tibet#british_invasions_of_Tibet_281904-1911.29 accessed on 10th August 2015.

⁴ Ibid.

This forced the 13th Dalai Lama to go in self-imposed exile. The Chinese government took full advantage of the situation in the absence of a stable and strong administration by strengthening its control over Tibet. It was only during 1907 to 1911 that Tibet came under the direct Chinese rule when the Zhao brothers – Zhao Erxen and Zhao Erfang conducted a military campaign to bring Tibet under Chinese rule.⁵ However, in 1911, before the Chinese could fully incorporate Tibet into China, the Manchu dynasty collapsed in the midst of the Chinese revolution, and a new era in Tibetan history was established. Tibet reverted to its former status as an independent country till 1950 when it was fully annexed by the Communist People's Republic of China.

Simla Convention

Representatives from Great Britain, China and Tibet met in 1913 in Simla Convention. Tibet was split into two parts consisting of inner Tibet and outer Tibet. Inner Tibet would be recognized under the suzerainty of China while outer Tibet was granted some degree of self-rule. Tibet and Britain signed this treaty, while China abstained. China claims its sovereignty over the whole of Tibet, but the Tibetan government in exile points to the Chinese government's failure to sign the Simla Convention as evidence of both outer and inner Tibet legally remaining under Dalai Lama's jurisdiction.⁶ The McMahon line was drawn between Tibet and China on the one hand, and between Tibet and British India, on the other. India regards McMahon line as a legal national border. The Dalai Lama government also accepts it as an official border, but China rejects the Simla Convention and claims that since the Tibetan government was not sovereign, it did not have any power to conclude treaties. The Chinese government continues to harbour the grievance that the McMahon Line illegitimately transferred vast chunk of territory to India. This disputed territory is presently called Arunachal Pradesh by India and South Tibet by China.

In 1928 the Government of China sent a mission to Lhasa to invite Tibet to join the Chinese Republic, which was turned down by the Tibetan government. However, soon thereafter, China declared Tibet as a province of China in 1931. A Chinese mission was sent again to Lhasa in 1934 in connection with the death of 13th Dalai Lama. China wanted to exercise its authority in the process of selection of the 14th Dalai Lama, which was not acceptable to Tibet. Tibet remained neutral during the Second World War. After the Second World War, China captured Tibet in 1949. Many countries issued statements in the deliberation of UN General Assembly, reiterating Tibet's independent status. Delegates of Philippines also declared, "... it

⁵<http://www.indiandefencereview.com/2009/02/Tibet-the-realissue2.html+who+was+Zhao+Erxen+and+Zhao+Erfang+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=in> accessed on 12th August 2009.

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simla_Accord_1914) accessed on 24 October 2009.

was clear on the eve of invasion in 1950, Tibet was not under the rule of any foreign country". The delegates from Thailand reminded the Assembly that the majority of states 'refute the contention that Tibet is part of China'.⁷

The Seventeen Point Agreement

The Seventeen Point Agreement between China and Tibet was signed in Peking on 23rd may 1951. The key features of the Agreement were as follows:

1. The Central Authorities will not alter the existing political system in Tibet. The central authorities will also not alter the established status, functions, and powers of the Dalai Lama. Officials of various ranks will hold office as usual.
2. The policy of freedom of religious belief laid down in the common program of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference shall be carried out. The religious belief, customs, and habits of the Tibetan people shall be respected, and lama monasteries shall be protected. The central authorities will not effect a change in the income of the monasteries.
3. In matters related to various reforms in Tibet, there will be no compulsion on the part of the central authorities. The local government of Tibet should carry out reforms of its own accord, and when the people raise demands for reform, they shall be settled by means of consultation with the leading personnel of Tibet.
4. The People's Liberation Army entering Tibet shall abide by all the above-mentioned policies and shall also be fair in buying and selling and shall not arbitrarily take a single needle or thread from the people (Smith, 1996: 299-300).

His Holiness Dalai Lama reacted by saying that this agreement was not voluntary. The then prevailing circumstances forces the Tibetan representative to sign it. In a statement issued at Musoorie on 20 June 1959, he had remarked:

... the agreement which followed the invasion of Tibet was also thrust upon its people and government by force of arms. It was never accepted by them of their own free will. The consent of the

⁷ This information has been taken from an article titled 'History of Tibet before the Chinese invasion of 1949' available at <http://www.saveTibet.org/resource-centre/all-about-Tibet/history-Tibet-before-chinese-invasion-1949> accessed on 20th November 2011.

government was secured under duress and at the point of the bayonet. My representatives were compelled to sign the agreement under the threat of further military operations against Tibet by the invading armies of China to the utter ravage and ruin of the country. Even the Tibetan seal which was affixed to the agreement was not the seal of my representative but the seal copied and fabricated by the Chinese authorities in Peking and kept in their possession ever since.⁸

It was in the wake of signing of this Agreement that Tibet officially became a part of China. It's a different matter, however, that China has never abided by the rules of the Agreement. China has consistently tried to undermine the authority of Dalai Lama and has persecuted hundreds of Tibetan religious leaders.

The Dalai Lama Enters Exile

Soon after assuming power in 1949, China staked a claim that Tibet was an integral part of its territory, which was followed by quick actions to bring it within total control. By October 1950 the People's Liberation Army had already penetrated deep into Tibet. This was followed by marching in of some 3000 Chinese liberation forces into the capital city of Lhasa on March 1951. There were about 2, 22,000 troops of the People's Liberation Army stationed in Tibet in 1954 when Tibet was hit by a serious famine. The Chinese government inaugurated the Preparatory Committee for the Autonomous Region of Tibet in 1956 which was headed by Dalai Lama. While the ostensible aim of this committee was to modernize Tibet, it was in reality nothing but a rubber stamp committee to legitimize its claim over Tibet. The revolt which broke out in 1956 in Tibet was crushed by the Chinese forces in no time. Nearly 1, 00,000 Chinese forces were deployed to disarm the Tibetans. The People's Liberation Army arrested many monks, nuns and leaders. In March 1959, the Tibetans marched to the street of Lhasa demanding, "Tibet for Tibetans" and shouting, "From today Tibet is Independent".⁹ This only led to further brutality by the Chinese forces, leading to the flight of the Dalai Lama and his followers to India in 1959. Once in India, the Dalai Lama established the Tibetan Government in Exile. In his Autobiography *My Land and My People* Dalai Lama recollected:

The first thought in the mind of every official within the palacewas that my life must be saved and I must leave the palace and the city at onceeverything was uncertain, except the

⁸ China on Tibet-the 17 point agreement-<http://www.freeTibet.org/about/China-Tibet-Tibetian-view-17-point-agreement> accessed on 29th October 2009.

⁹ <http://www.Tibet.org/why/march10.html> accessed on 21st August 2009.

compelling anxiety of all my people to get me away before the Chinese destruction and massacre begun.

Ironically, the cycle of repression unleashed by the Chinese government did not stop with the flight of the Dalai Lama to India. But before the Chinese authority could get back to more repression, Tibet was hit by one of the worst famines in history which was actually an outcome of Mao's policy. In some places, whole families had perished and the death rate was very high. "In the past Tibet lived in a dark barbaric feudalism but there was never such a shortage of food, especially after Buddhism had spread....In Tibet from 1959 to 1961, for two years almost all animal husbandry and farming were stopped. The nomads had no grain to eat and the farmers had no meat, butter or salt".¹⁰ The Chinese Government under the leadership of Mao asked Panchen Lama to take the power of Dalai Lama. On refusal to do so, Panchen Lama was arrested in 1964 and imprisoned until 1974. After the arrest of Panchen Lama, China no longer felt restrained by its earlier promises and was free to do whatever it liked.

Cultural Revolution

Cultural Revolution took place in 1966 and continued till 1976 during which many symbols of Tibetan religious life including monasteries were destroyed by the Chinese. Before destroying religious objects Red Guards would take away as many things as they could. For example, "objects made of gold, silver, copper, brass, gold etc. were beaten into ingots and transported on the back of animals to the nearest motorable road from where they were loaded onto hundreds of trucks and carted out to China where they were melted down".¹¹ Firstly, China wanted to stamp Buddhism out of existence. Tibetans were not allowed to practice their religion and were even forced to destroy their religious books. The Red Guards would forcibly hand over the copies of Mao's thought to all the Tibetans with a view to indoctrinating them into the communist mould. Secondly, the Chinese government forced the Tibetan women to marry Chinese men and prevented them from marrying Tibetan men. Moreover, many Monks and Nuns had lost their lives and only about thirteen monasteries could survive the wrath of the Cultural Revolution which ended with Mao's death in 1979.

China under Deng Xiaoping

Deng Xiaoping took over the rein of China after the death of Mao. Under the new regime, "Chinese government aimed at improving Tibetan economic conditions and allowing more expressions of Tibetan culture including some Tibetan practices. This economic and cultural liberalization, it was anticipated, would diffuse the remnants of

¹⁰ http://www.globalsourcenetwork.org/Tibet_9-12.htm.accessed on 15th October 2009.

¹¹ <http://www.studentsforafreeTibet.org/article.php?id=370> accessed on 29th August 2009.

Tibetan discontentment with Chinese rule” (Smith 1996: 63). Deng Xiaoping sent an unofficial envoy to Gyalo Thondup with an offer to set up a direct communication channel between the Dalai Lama and the new Chinese leadership. The new agreement required the representative of Dalai Lama to inspect each region of the country and report back to him. The first such delegation was sent in the summer of 1979 and duly reported its report to Dalai Lama. The report indicted the Chinese government for various human rights violations, making the situation in Tibet far worse than what the government in exile had anticipated. A second delegation in 1980, which was sent to examine the standard of education, was awe-struck to find instances of brutal death resulting from torture and hunger. However, Deng Xiaoping’s assurances to Dalai Lama that he was open to discuss and resolve all issues except the issue of Tibetan independence led to the beginning of a new phase of relationship between the two entities. Dalai Lama responded positively by adopting the *Middle Way Approach*.

Middle Way Approach

The adoption of the ‘Middle Way’ approach by Dalai Lama in 1979 marked a turning point in the history of Tibetan resistance movement. With this, Dalai Lama moved away from the traditional line of seeking independence for Tibet, which it had maintained since its occupation by China in 1950. In essence, the Middle Way approach of Dalai Lama is supposedly forward-looking rather than remaining obsessed with the past. As articulated by Dalai Lama himself:

“My Middle Way approach, not separate from China-economically bound to the People Republic China. Meanwhile, full-autonomy, self government, culture, education, environment, spiritually these things we Tibetans can manage better. I am quiet sure that our Tibetan tradition, Tibetan spirituality can help millions of Chinese. Already some Chinese artists, some Chinese thinkers are showing interest in Tibet, in Tibetan Buddhism. So, China and Tibet not separate. Help each other, interdependent” (RobertsII and Roberts, 2009, p185).

The 1987 Tibetan Riots

The situation dramatically deteriorated in 1987 with large scale demographic invasion of Tibet by Han people from mainland China, leading to massive protest demonstrations by the Tibetans against the Chinese rule. In the absence of accurate figure, different sources hazard different figures of total Han presence in Tibet. The broad consensus, however, seems to be that it is nearly 7 million of the total population. The substantial presence of the Hans in Tibet allows the Chinese government not only to control the political and the military structures in Tibet with ease, but also helps shape the economic, cultural and religious lives of the people.

Over the years, Tibet has not only come to be used as a buffer zone between India and China, but has also undergone a dramatic demographic metamorphosis bearing a visibly Chinese look.

Five Point Peace Agreement

The Chinese government also rejected the five-point Peace Agreement which was proposed by Dalai Lama in 1987 during the course of addressing the U.S. Congress in Washington. *This peace plan contained five basic components:* the transformation of the whole of Tibet into a zone of peace; abandonment of China's population transfer policy which threatens the very existence of the Tibetans as a people; respect for Tibetan people's fundamental human rights and democratic freedom; restoration and protection of Tibet's natural environment; commencement of earnest negotiations on the future status of Tibet and of relations between the Tibetan and Chinese peoples.¹² The rejection of the same by China led to a massive demonstration in Tibet on 5 March 1987 which was ruthlessly crushed by the Chinese forces. At the end of it, hundreds of Tibetans were arrested and many of them lost their lives.

Strasbourg Proposal

A little more than a year later, Dalai Lama proposed another set of proposals called Strasbourg Proposal on 15 June 1988. As a matter of fact, it was nothing but a slightly modified version of the five-point Peace Agreement. However, the Strasbourg Proposal clearly articulated that Tibet will accept Chinese sovereignty provide a want wide range of autonomy is conceded by the Chinese government. While the proposal evoked near-global acceptance, it was rejected by China. Interestingly, the Strasbourg Proposal failed to find acceptance even among some of the Tibetans. Their main grievance is that Dalai Lama is perhaps giving in a little too much by making huge compromises from the point of view of Tibet's future. The Chinese government, on the other hand, suspects that conceding any genuine autonomy might allow Dalai Lama to regain power all over Tibet. Trying to steer clear himself of such allegations, Dalai Lama observed:

My involvement in the affairs of Tibet is not for the purpose of claiming certain personal rights or political position for myself or attempting to stake claims for the Tibetan administration in exile. In 1992 in a formal announcement I stated clearly that when we return to Tibet with a certain degree of freedom I will not hold any office in the Tibetan government or any other political position and that the present Tibetan administration in exile will be dissolved.

¹² <http://www.dalailama.com/messages/Tibet/five-point-peace-plan> accessed on 8th October 2009.

Moreover, the Tibetans working in Tibet should carry on the main responsibility of administering Tibet.¹³

The rejection of Strasbourg Proposal was followed by an outbreak of violent protests in Tibet in 1989 in which several monks were killed at the hands of the Chinese police. The police had opened fire on the protesters without a forewarning on 7 March. The situation worsened to the extent that Martial Law had to be imposed in Tibet. Massive violation of human rights like unlawful detention of hundreds of Tibetans took place in the wake of the clamping of the Martial Law. The People's Liberation Army virtually brought the whole of Tibet under siege and all foreign tourists, diplomats and journalists were expelled.

Tibetan National Uprising Of 2008

The 2008 Olympic Games organised by China was used by the Tibetans as a unique opportunity to expose Chinese excesses committed on them since its forcible occupation in 1950. A protest group consisting of five different exiled Tibetan groups was formed on 4 January 2008 to draw the attention of the world towards Chinese brutal and illegal occupation of Tibet. The fact that the holding of the Olympic Games in China in 2008 coincided with the 50 anniversary of Tibetan uprising served as an added attraction for the protesters to champion the cause of the beleaguered people. Some of the main demands of the group were: return of Dalai Lama to Tibet, the end of Chinese illegal occupation, release of all Tibetan prisoners, and cancellation of 2008 Summer Olympic.

The protesters carefully chose 10 March 2008 as the beginning day of a long-drawn resistance movement as it coincided with the 49 anniversary of Tibetan National Uprising. Some 300 monks assembled on the day at Drepung Monastery, Lhasa to demonstrate that even after nearly half-a-decade of oppression, the Tibetan spirit could not be crushed by the Chinese and that they were willing to resist Tibetan forcible occupation. In a show of strength, the Tibetans went all out by burning public property and looting the shops owned by the Hans Chinese on 14 March 2008. The Chinese media alleged that large-scale weapons had been found in Lhasa monasteries.

The Olympic Torch relay began on 24 March 2008 in Greece. Meanwhile in Dharamshala, the *Tibetan Youth Congress* lit its own independence torch on March 25 which ended up inside Tibet before the start of the Olympic Games in Beijing on 8 August 2008. The monks, nuns and ordinary Tibetans were all out on the street of Lhasa street chanting, "Free Tibet, Free Tibet"; "Tibet is not free"; and "long live the

¹³ <http://blogcritics.org/politics/article/giving-up-dreams-Tibet-China-the/>.accessed on 8th October 2009.

Dalai Lama”.¹⁴ A series of global protests were held in Kathmandu, New Delhi, Chicago, San Francisco, Paris and London. For the Tibetans, the 2008 Olympic in China offered a great opportunity for protest, as conventionally Olympic is allowed to be held in only those countries which enjoy good track record in the area of respect for human rights. Since this clearly was not so in the case of China, it was believed that protest against China’s dismal human rights record on the eve of the hosting of the same would help draw global public attention and would strengthen the Tibetan cause for freedom or independence.

With hundreds of local students joining hands, Jantar Mantar in New Delhi was soon turned into a mini-Tibet. The adjoining streets too could well be seen to be full with activists sporting ‘Free Tibet’ t-shirts and head bands. They shouted slogans in Hindi with their Indian supporters to drive home the point that India too perhaps justified their demands, “gali-gali mei shor hai, Hu Jintao hatyara hai” (every street rings, Hu jintao is a killer), “azadi sab ko pyara hai” [freedom is loved by all], “North Pole South Pole, Bharat hamara saath do (India, support us).¹⁵

What is notable about such protests is that these were non-violent and passed off largely peacefully. Contrary to the Chinese claim that only 22 death took place all of whom were of Han Chinese, the actual story inside Tibet is reported to be totally different. According to the sources of the Tibetan government-in-exile, some 203 civilians lost their lives died in those two months of protest against the Chinese authority. International federation of journalism came up with some figures which suggest that there had been more than 350 occasions of interference by the Chinese authorities in the coverage of the Olympic itself and the restrictions continues. In fact, restrictions were imposed even on the reporting of very mundane and innocuous matters like supply of polluted Chinese milk. Those reporting such issues were either thrown out of China or were put behind the bars (Tripathi, 29th, November, 2009).

China systematically shut Tibet out from the outside world by banning internet, mobile phones, reporters’ visit to Tibet, and even tourists wanting to visit Tibet. Dalai Lama even went to the extent of threatening to step down as Tibetan political leader if the violence in Tibet was not stopped. The People’s Republic of China, on the other hand, declared that the uprising and unrest in Lhasa and elsewhere were organised by the Dalai Clique. Zhang Qingle even went to the extent of calling the Dalai Lama ‘a monster with a human face’. This anti-China agitation eventually proved an eye-opener for those who had very little idea about the complex dynamics of day-to-day living conditions in Tibet. Thanks to the 2008 Olympic Games, China was indeed exposed to the outside world like never before.

¹⁴ www.phayul.com/mobile/page=view&c=2&id=22960 accessed on 8th October 2009.

¹⁵ <http://www.freeTibet.org/about/olympic/march/2008> accessed on 23 August 2009.

Self –Immolation done by Tibetans for their freedom struggle

The first Tibetan self-immolation took place on April 27, 1998, during a hunger strike in New

Delhi. It was carried out by Thupten Ngodup, a 60-year old ex-monk and ex-soldier. On April 23 1998, a few days prior to his self-immolation, Thupten was interviewed by the Norwegian-sponsored radio station Voice of Tibet. He began by saying, “I joined the Hunger

Strike because I am a Tibetan and I have a duty to perform... No, there is no fear in my heart at all”.¹⁶ He ended the interview saying,

I am giving up my life to bring about peace and fulfilment to my unhappy people... I have one hundred percent confidence that the people inside Tibet will not only continue the struggle but will intensify it. They will never sit back and not struggle (Norbu, 1998).¹⁷

Basically, the main reason behind the self-immolations is China’s illegal occupation of Tibet and more than 60 years destruction of Tibetan civilization. Therefore in the beginning Dalai Lama has different perception even he consider it as against Buddhist ethics. But later Dalai Lama referred that self immolation causes no physical harm to others and it is not an act of violence. His Holiness Dalai Lama believes:

These sad incidents show that the people involved believe in non-violence. These people are not drunk or overwhelmed by family problems and they could have turned to violence against others. Instead they chose to sacrifice themselves. Tibetans remain committed to non violence.¹⁸

Sino-Tibetan Dialogue

It has been the consistent position of His Holiness Dalai Lama that the question of Tibet must be resolved through dialogue with the best interest of Tibetan people in mind. After China invaded Tibet, Dalai Lama engaged in dialogue with China in 1951 and in 1954 to avoid bloodshed. During Deng Xiaoping the door of negotiation was open. Even Dalai Lama sent his secret envoys on visits to China. In 1981 Chinese

¹⁶ <http://www.phayul.com/mobile/?page=view&c=4&id=21203>

¹⁷ Total no. of Self-immolations are 144 (118 Male and 2Female), (2009: 1; 2011:12; 2012: 85; 2013: 26; 2014: 11; and 2015 : 7; 2016: 2) <http://Tibet.net/situation-in-Tibet/factsheet-immolation-2011-2012>.

¹⁸ <https://issuu.com/dhardho/docs/the-Tibet-post-international-000097> accessed on 13 January 2010

government expressed willingness to allow Dalai Lama to return to the motherland (to China not to Tibet). Then two delegates were sent to Beijing in 1982 and in 1984. They insisted that the issue was not the Dalai Lama, but the welfare of six million Tibetans. On 23 June 1988 after the Strasbourg Proposal China's foreign ministry categorically remarked that "People's Republic of China will not accept Tibetan independence, semi independence, or individual independence in disguised form". On 21 September 1988, the Chinese government conveyed it to Delhi embassy that it is willing to talk with Dalai Lama provided "the talks [are] held in Beijing, Hong Kong or any other embassy. If Dalai Lama finds it suitable then we will talk with them".¹⁹ On the same day Dalai Lama responded by expressing his willingness to talk and proposed Geneva instead as a venue. The Chinese government rejected the venue and blamed Dalai Lama for his insincerity in resolving the issue. On 23 January 1992, the Tibetan government-in-exile said that they should not initiate any dialogue with China unless there was a positive attitude from Chinese leadership. In 1993 Dalai Lama decided to send two of his members to China, but they found to their dismay that the Chinese hard-line attitude towards his holiness Dalai Lama had remain unchanged. Dalai Lama issue a press statement on 4 September 1993 in which he made his position crystal clear, "I have never called for negotiation on independence of Tibet, but only want genuine autonomy for Tibetans within the framework of Chinese constitution".²⁰ This marked the beginning of the end of formal contact between China and Tibet. Even the American initiative to persuade China to resume dialogue with Dalai Lama on 27th June 1998 did not cut any ice. China responded by observing that "As long as the Dalai Lama makes a public commitment that Tibet is an inalienable part of China and Taiwan is a province of China, then the door to dialogue and negotiation is open".²¹

However, the dialogue process was put back on track in September 2002 when Beijing hosted a four member Tibetan delegates headed by Lodi Gyari. The aim of this meeting was to create an environment for direct face-to-face meeting between Tibet and China. Dalai Lama was also asked to clarify as to what he exactly meant by his 'Middle Way Approach'. Between 2002 and 2010 then nine rounds of talk have been held between Tibet and China.

¹⁹ www.phayul.com/new/artcle.aspr/id=26192&t=1&c=2 accessed on 1st December 2009.

²⁰ <http://www.tchrd.org/press/1993/nb199395> accessed in 1st December 2009.

²¹ <http://www.Tibet.com/govt/long.html> accessed on 22nd November 2009.

All these rounds of talk have remained mired in controversies over the status of Tibet, with both Tibet and China making accusations and counter-accusations against each other. The ambiguity in the Tibet-China relationship has been far from over despite consistent efforts made by Dalai Lama that his 'Middle Way Approach' does not seek any sovereign independent status for Tibet. Such explanations offered by Dalai Lama have failed to convince China of the genuine intent of the Tibetans which is merely seeking greater autonomy within the framework of the Chinese constitution. It's a different matter though that China did express her willingness to enter into a meaningful dialogue with Dalai Lama on the eve of the Olympic Games in 2008. Given the staging of world-wide protests against China's occupation of Tibet on the eve of the 2008 Olympic Games, this was a strategic move by China to convey to the world that it did wish to resolve the vexed Tibetan issue. Interestingly, the nature of relationship between the two is back to square one in the aftermath of the Olympic Games, with very little hope of any amicable resolution of the issue.

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