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## Book Review

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# Tibet: the century's forgotten crime against humanity

by Mary M. Burdman

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### **Freedom in Exile, The Autobiography of the Dalai Lama**

by Tenzin Gyatso

HarperCollins, New York, 1990

288 pages, hardbound, \$22.95

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Dr. Tenzin Choedrak, a Tibetan who had been the personal physician of the Dalai Lama in the 1950s, was imprisoned by the Chinese communist military regime in Tibet for 20 years. When finally released and able to escape to join the exiled Tibetan leader in Dharamsala, India in 1980, Dr. Choedrak told the Dalai Lama and other Tibetans living there in exile, what the Chinese were doing to the tens of thousands of Tibetans they imprisoned after the national Tibetan uprising in 1959. Prisoners, forced to work all day and then subjected to brainwashing sessions until late at night, were so starved that they ate their own clothing. Once, when in a prison hospital, Dr. Choedrak said, he watched another prisoner grow "so desperate for nourishment, that when he passed a worm in his meagre stool, he washed it and ate it."

This, writes Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet, is what the Chinese occupiers have done to his nation since they invaded in October 1950. His autobiography, *Freedom in Exile*, documents in the most straightforward terms that China is attempting to eliminate not only the Tibetan people, but also Tibet as a nation, by destroying its religion and culture, eliminating its history, and repopulating the entire country with Chinese. Control of Tibet, the "roof of the world," gives China command of one of the most strategic regions in Asia.

Yet for 40 years, the nations of the world have done nothing. The United States and British governments, now so ready to send the world to war against Iraq in the Middle

East, supposedly—and sanctimoniously—to defend a small nation against aggression, have not even received the Dalai Lama, the acknowledged spiritual leader of world Buddhism, for fear of offending Beijing. The only situation in the world broadly comparable to that of Tibet is that of Lithuania and the other Baltic states seized by the Soviet Union under the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939, and subjected to the same national murder by communist police-state tyranny. Just as now, the United States will do nothing to aid the freedom fighters of Lithuania, so in 1950, the U.S. and British governments would not even receive a delegation sent from the Dalai Lama's government to ask for aid.

### **Aggression against a small neighbor**

The Chinese invaded when the Dalai Lama was 15 years old; in 1959, threatened with capture by the Chinese as the Tibetan population rose in revolt, he fled to India. In the intervening period he had been brought to Beijing by the Chinese where he, then sympathetic to Marxism, got a rude shock at the corruption and totalitarian control he found there. He also learned that Mao Zedong had no intention of ever giving up Chinese control of Tibet.

Why Mao was so insistent on controlling Tibet, was demonstrated a few years later, when the Chinese defeated India in the 1962 border war. This war, the Dalai Lama writes, broke the spirit of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, because it destroyed his hope for a free Asia of sovereign nations, coexisting in harmony. Nehru, who had given protection and very generous help, especially education, to the 100,000 Tibetans who fled to India, died in 1964.

In Tibet, the killing goes on. Of a population of 6 million, 1.25 million have been *killed* by the Chinese invaders and millions more suffered terrible repression. In Amdo province, where the Dalai Lama was born, is the largest gulag in the world, capable of holding up to 10 million persons.

Yet the Tibetans have met this repression with tremen-

dous courage. Tibetans, fighting with little more than their ponies and rifles, conducted guerrilla warfare for years that led to a general uprising in 1959. The only help they ever got were a few defective weapons dropped to them by the Central Intelligence Agency—until, of course, the United States, with Henry Kissinger at the lead, reopened relations with China beginning in 1972.

In October 1987, another uprising began in Tibet when the Chinese killed at least eight demonstrators, most Buddhist monks and nuns, in the capital city of Lhasa. The uprising has continued, leading to terrible tragedy. Months before the June 1989 crackdown in Tiananmen Square, 10,000 Chinese People's Armed Police—the stormtroopers of the People's Liberation Army—slaughtered 450 Tibetans in the streets of Lhasa on March 6, 1989, after luring them into an ambush. This omen of the Tiananmen events was revealed this past August by Chinese journalist Tang Daxian, now a dissident in exile in Paris.

### **Unspeakable atrocities**

Everything the Dalai Lama writes supports this account. It took him years to believe the reports he received of the Chinese genocide in Tibet, so horrific were the stories of torture and murder. Tibetans have been reduced to unspeakable poverty by the Chinese: People everywhere are reduced to eating leaves and grass when their tiny monthly rations run out, and are stunted by malnutrition. All the much-touted Chinese "improvements," including roads, schools, and hospitals, are solely for the use of the Chinese immigrants. Monasteries were first stripped bare and all treasures sent to China. Whatever was left standing was demolished by rampaging Red Guards during Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution holocaust. Tibetan couples are allowed only two children each and any woman who becomes pregnant a third time is forcibly aborted and brutally sterilized.

### **Proposals to restore Tibet**

The Dalai Lama has spent years traveling throughout the world speaking on Tibet and religion. He has in recent years made a number of proposals for Tibet. In September 1987, while addressing the Human Rights Caucus of the U.S. Congress, he proposed a Five Point Peace Plan, which calls for:

- transforming all Tibet into a "zone of peace";
- ending China's "population transfer policy which threatens the very existence of the Tibetans as a people";
- respect for the Tibetan people's fundamental human rights; and
- 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.

The "Gang of Ancients" in Beijing has totally exploited Tibet's strategic location. They now have 300,000 troops there, most along the still-disputed border with India, but

50,000 within a day's march of Lhasa. The government in Beijing maintains one-third of their nuclear weaponry in Tibet. Like neighboring Xinjiang, which was East Turkestan until the Chinese overran it in 1949, Tibet has some of the world's richest uranium deposits.

Tibet is in a unique situation, where India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, and the Soviet Union all meet in Central Asia. It lies directly between the world's two most populous nations, India and China, while only sparsely populated itself; its 6 million people are dispersed over a land mass equal to the size of Western Europe. Indeed, Tibet is one of the relatively few countries of the world which could function in its own and neighboring nations' interests as a zone of peace. The current Beijing butchers will never agree to even partial autonomy, to say nothing of dismantling their arsenal in Tibet. But, given the Dalai Lama's conviction that the Gang of Ancients cannot survive more than 5-10 years, the Dalai Lama's proposals may be wise.

As for the call for "restoring and protecting the natural environment," the reader should not jump to the simplistic conclusion that this is a "green" proposal. Consider this: Even a brief visit to former East Germany, which was the most advanced of the communist bloc nations, gives one a very different perspective on what is usually referred to as "protecting the environment." Environmentalism in Western Europe or the United States is an anti-human cult. But in East Germany, so great was the "primitive accumulation" and so little the investment made in advanced technology, that the air reeks of brown coal smoke even in summer. If it remains under communist exploitation much longer, vast areas of China could be reduced to barren desert. Tibet is faring even worse. Every day, hundreds of trucks full of logs lurch down the roads to China. If this goes on much longer, there is grave risk of massive flooding of India, Bangladesh, and China itself. The greatest rivers in Asia, the Brahmaputra and the Yangtze, rise in Tibet's mountains. The Chinese are even importing other nations' nuclear wastes and dumping them in Tibet, whose population Beijing considers so expendable.

The Dalai Lama is a controversial figure, unfortunately more because of his leadership of world Buddhism than the failure of Western nations to protest Chinese destruction of Tibet. The Dalai Lama describes his religion, to which he is very committed, at length—but with a gentle humor and irony that many Westerners could learn from. Of course, Tibet has been a focus for Western cultists for generations, from the British imperialists to the Nazi leadership to "New Age" cultists today. But Westerners must learn to differentiate between the culture of an ancient nation and aberrations or gimmicky exploitations in their own midst. "When it actually comes to people changing their religion, I usually advise them to think the matter through very carefully. Rushing into a new religion can give rise to mental conflict and is nearly always difficult," the Dalai Lama writes. Cultists take warning.