

# Mao's Liberation of Tibet

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It is useful to keep the whole picture in mind, rather than blindly follow what the 'vegetarian between meals' would lead us to believe (see further [Sautman](#)). To begin with, there is the simple historical question. Although accounts differ in relation to Tibet, the reality is that this region has been subject to Chinese rule in various ways since at least the eighteenth century under the Qing dynasty (with [Chinese claims](#) to de jure rule since the Yuan dynasty in the thirteenth century). Claims to some form of independence hark back to an image of the feudal Tibetan empire from the seventh to the eleventh centuries.

What happened after the liberation of Tibet in 1951 by the PLA, which was supported a wide range of Tibetans? A comprehensive 17-point agreement was reached in 1951, approved by all lamas and the Dalai Lama himself. Subsequent CIA agitation, funding, arms and logistics led to renegeing on the agreement and the fateful 1959 uprising, which failed to garner widespread support, especially among those Tibetans who had been abused under the former feudal system. The Dalai Lama and his entourage were assisted by the CIA to flee the Tibetan region. Eventually, the CIA wound up its well-publicised 'covert' activities in the 1970s, only to be replaced by the innocuous sounding National Endowment for Democracy in 1984 (instituted under Ronald Reagan). As Elizabeth Davis's careful study indicates, 'Allen Weinstein, the NED's first acting president, observed that "A lot of what we [the NED] do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA'. A range of

other western government-sponsored bodies work together with the NED to undermine Chinese sovereignty.

Even more, the factionalism of the Tibetan diaspora is bewildering. Many have not lived in the Tibetan region for two generations and they spend as much time attacking each other as they spend in trying to garner cash and support from states keen to irritate China. This factionalism is by no means new, for the struggles between different groups in Tibet's history often used torture, violence and displacement to assert their control.

What about China's position? This boils down to two strategies. The immediate aim is security and peace in the Tibetan autonomous region. Apart from the CIA-sponsored uprising in 1959, another more recent example concerns the deadly 2008 riots in Lhasa, in which some Tibetans burned, looted and killed Han Chinese and Muslims. From a Chinese perspective, these acts are part of the 'separatism, extremism and terrorism' continuum.

The long-term aim is socio-economic improvement, a core feature of the 'preferential policy [*youhui zhengce*]' for all minority nationalities. Obviously, this takes time but we can already see the significant improvements in living standards, with massive infrastructure projects, favourable conditions for Tibetan businesses, and a host of other measures. The Tibetan region has one of the highest growth rates in China now, although it is belated in comparison with the eastern regions of China.

As I have observed on a number of occasions before, socio-economic improvement is the basis of a Chinese Marxist approach to human rights, which may be described as the right to economic well-being. While the Euro-American tradition focuses on civil and political rights, and uses these to irritate China, it neglects the whole other dimension of the right to economic wellbeing, which includes the rights to work and to development. The Chinese emphasis goes back in more immediate history to the Jiangxi-Fujian Soviet of the early 1930s, with its capital in Ruijin. Here developed what may be called the 'Ruijin ethos': focus first on the people's need for food, shelter, clothing and security; only when these are secured will they become communists. In the longer tradition, the Confucian ethos is strong, particularly with the desire for at least a *xiaokang* society, meaning that one is moderately well-off, healthy, and peaceful. This basic human right in China has actually been embodied in the United Nations' *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (1976). Article 11(1) is relevant here, which mentions that state parties 'recognize the rights of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing, and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions'. Notably, the United States has not ratified this covenant.

But does this mean civil and political rights are curtailed for militant Tibetans? If they engage in 'separatism, extremism and terrorism', yes. This is a security issue. But as [Barry Sautman](#) observes:

The point to stress is that there is no repression of Tibetans simply for being Tibetan. Nor does the Chinese government repress religion per se. Instead, Tibetans receive a range of preferential policies, and authorised religions in China receive state support. Where religious organisations pose no political threat, they are regulated by the state and can generally function openly, especially among ethnic minorities. The relation between religious organisations and the state is informed by longstanding Chinese traditions; separatism is another story. Under international law, states may make separatism illegal. The Chinese government, based on China's history of cycles of territorial unity and disunity, makes use of that right.

On the matter of culture it is worth noting the most thorough treatment of the issue by Colin Mackerras, who observes, 'what strikes me most forcefully about the period since 1980 or so is not how much the Chinese have harmed Tibetan culture, but how much they have allowed, even encouraged it to revive; not how weak it is, but how strong'.

Finally, two pieces from none other than the Dalai Lama himself. The first is a telegram sent to Mao in 1951, indicating support of the 17-point agreement, which included the statement: 'The central authorities will not alter the established status, functions and powers of the Dalai Lama'.

རྒྱ་ལའི་ཧྲ་མ་ལུ་མེད་བཅུ་བཞི་པའ་ཕྱི་མ་ཐུན་ཐུང་བར་བཞེ་བལྟར་ལྷ་བའི་དོན་དུ་  
གུའུ་ཞི་མའོ་ཙོ་ཏུང་ལ་ཕུལ་བའི་ཏུང་།

第十四世達賴喇嘛為擁護協議事致毛澤東主席電  
The 14th Dalai Lama's Cables to Chairman Mao Zedong  
Expressing Support for the Agreement

29.8 × 20.9

གུང་དངུང་ཡིག་ཚང་ལ་བའ་དུ་ལུ་མ་ཐུན་ཐུང་མ་ཡོད།

中央檔案館藏

The Central People's Government,

Following is the translation of two cables sent by the Dalai Lama to Chairman Mao:

(1) Chairman Mao of the Central People's Government,

This year the local government of Tibet sent five delegates with full authority headed by Kaloon Ngapoi to Beijing in late April 1951 to conduct peace talks with delegates with full authority appointed by the Central People's Government. On the basis of friendship, delegates on both sides concluded the Agreement on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet on May 23, 1951. The local government of Tibet as well as the Tibetan monks and laymen unanimously support this agreement, and under the leadership of Chairman Mao and the Central People's Government, will actively assist the People's Liberation Army in Tibet to consolidate national defence, drive imperialist influences out of Tibet and safeguard the unification of the territory and the sovereignty of the motherland. I hereby send this cable to inform you of this.

Preserved by the Central Archives.

The second is a poem he wrote in 1954 concerning Mao Zedong:

*Hymn to Chairman Mao*

The great national leader of the Central People's Government, Chairman Mao, is the cakravarti<sup>1</sup> born out of boundless fine merits. For a long time I wished to write a hymn praying for his long life and the success of his work. It happened that the Klatsung-kerqun Lama of Kantsu Monastery in Inner Mongolia wrote me from afar, saluting me and asked me to write a poem. I agreed to do so, as it coincides with my own wishes.

The Fourteenth Dalai Lama Dantzen-Jaltso at Norbulin-shenfu Palace, 1954

O, the Triratna,<sup>2</sup> (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) which bestows blessings on the world,  
Protect us with your incomparable and blessed light which shines forever!

(The above is customary invocation preceding a hymn. The poem itself follows.)

O! Chairman Mao! Your brilliance and deeds are like those of Brahma and Mahasammata, creators of the world.

<sup>1</sup> Cakravarti, a holy powerful monarch.  
<sup>2</sup> Triratna, the Trinity of Buddha, Dharma (the Law) and Sangha, the congregation of believers.

Only from an infinite number of good deeds can such a leader be born, who is like the sun shining over the world.

Your writings are precious as pearls, abundant and powerful as the high tide of ocean reaching the edges of the sky.

O! most honorable Chairman Mao, may you long live!

All people look to you as to a kind protecting mother, they paint pictures of you with hearts full of emotion.

May you live in the world forever and point out to us the peaceful road!

Our vast land was burdened with pain, with shackles and darkness.

You liberated all with your brilliance. People now are happy, full of blessings!

Your work for peace is a white jewelled umbrella, giving shade over heaven and earth and mankind.

Your fame is like golden bells on the umbrella, ringing and turning forever in the sky!

Our foe, the blood-thirsty imperialists, are poisonous snakes, and messengers of the devil furtively crawling.

You are the undaunted roc which conquered the poisonous serpent. To you be power!

The cultural and industrial constructions which make the people prosperous and defeat the enemy's armed forces are like a vast sea;

These constructions develop continuously until they shall make this world as full of satisfaction as heaven.

The perfect religion of Sakyamuni (Buddha) is like a Moonlight pearl lamp shining bright.  
It is like a perfumed pearl ornament which we wear without prohibition. O! Of this we are proud!

Your will is like the gathering of clouds, your call like thunder,  
From these comes timely rain to nourish selflessly the earth!

As the Ganges River rushes precious and to all the earth

The cause of peace and justice will bring to all people boundless joy!

May our world gradually become as happy as Paradise!

May the torch of the world, our great leader, be lit forever!

(The hymn proper ends here, the following being the customary prayer for the realization of the hymn.)

May the powers of the benevolent Bodhisattvas, the resourceful Dharma-Protector, and the truthful words of the Maharishts make these good hopes true!

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(Translation made from Tibetan to Chinese to English.)