CHAPTER IV

TIBETAN REVOLT (1959-1989): ETHNIC CONFLICT AND SECURITY CRISIS
In marked contrast to pre-1950 strategic and security balance in Inner and South Asia, the People's Republic of China (PRC) military takeover of Tibet in 1950 disturbed the regional strategic environment directly undermining the security of 'Politically Relevant International Environment' (PRIE) especially India. In Tibet itself, half a century of Chinese rule marked by 'tight, multilayered Chinese security system, structural violence and denial of social space' has reinforced Tibetan ethnic consciousness which presents a major political challenge to the PRC. Moreover, owing to its historical legacy and its geo-strategic location, Tibet continues to loom large on the geo politics of Central, Northeast, and South Asia as a strategic frontier region with destabilising conflict potential. Therefore, international security in the region is undermined due to Chinese occupation and military intervention in Tibet. And to ensure a stable regional environment, restoration of Tibet to its pre-1950 status has become an imperative.

Our attempt here, then, is to analyse the causes and characteristics of ethnic conflict in Tibet due to the Chinese rule, which has precipitated a serious crisis of legitimacy for the Han State and has also heightened the security concerns of regional powers in the region.
Chinese Strategic Take Over And Ethnic Conflict In Tibet:

In fact, one of the main reasons for the communist takeover of Tibet is strategic, rather than historical claims or ideological motives. At the turn of the century, it was the arena of the 'Great Game'\(^1\) between Great Britain, Tsarist Russia. And in the late 1940s, when two new regimes communist China and independent India emerged in China and India, Tibet became a matter of acute contention between the two. It was created as a buffer between India and China by the British to protect the 2000 miles long India's North East frontier from external intervention. Tibet as a buffer served as a natural corridor of defense for India and China. The British attempt to make Tibet a buffer state among the rival imperial powers is now interpreted in Chinese historiography as a diabolical imperialist scheme to separate Tibet from China and opened the latter's backdoor to external vulnerability. We should note here that the idea of Tibet as a backdoor to China was first conceived by the East India Company. The British had trade interests not only in Tibet but in Western China as well. Tibet was a means to access not only the local

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\(^1\) Many scholars agree that the Anglo-Russian rivalry in Western Asia became one of the Central issues of European diplomacy in the 19th Century. This rivalry between Russia and Britain intensified after the Crimean War, and their intelligence and reconnaissance services engaged in an increasingly active global competition, as the two states maneuvered for position not only in the disintegrating areas of Ottoman Empire, but in Persia, Afghanistan, Central Asia, Tibet and Western China. This was the Great Game which was played for almost a century at the two states attempted to prevent each other from seizing control of critical areas in the inner Asian heartland and its periphery.
trade of Tibet itself and the adjoining Himalayan hills but also to the fabulous markets of the Chinese Empire. Republican China perceived Tibet as its backdoor which must be shut if China were to achieve national security. Thus, the Governor of Szechuan warned: "Tibet again is like the backdoor house. If the door is opened wide, robbers will flock into the apartments". Another Chinese official expressed a similar view "Tibet again is the door that shuts off Yunnan and Sichuan, and should we prove remiss, the teeth will feel cold when the lips have gone". China slammed the backdoor shut by militarily occupation of Tibet in 1950.

Strategically, China's intransigence in Tibet desires largely because of the fear of important geo-strategic territorial loss with significant implications for conflict and security in inner Asia. George Ginsburgs and Michael Mathos, who made the first study of Communist China and Tibet after 1950, were typical. "he who holds Tibet dominates the Himalayan Piedmont; he who dominates the Himalayan Piedmont threatens the Indian subcontinent; and he who threatens the Indian

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3 Premen Addy, Tibet on the Imperial Chess Board, Academic publishers, New Delhi, 1984, p.156.
subcontinent may well have all of South Asia within its reach, and with it all of Asia."^4

Tibet’s military occupation was justified by Han communist theoreticians as ideological enlightenment and they expected that material progress will gradually override ethnic loyalties, in much the same way as material progress was supposed to remove religious beliefs. But events proved later that the Chinese occupation of Tibet for national security reasons has destabilised the security environment and it is a simple case of Han expansionism under the facade of 'People's democracy', 'progress' and 'liberation'. It has bled ethnic revolts in Tibet against Han domination.

Hence, in order to understand the causes and characteristics of ethnic conflict in Tibet, it is necessary to analyse the PRC’s policy in Tibet, and the consequent socio-political tension generated by them.

The Consolidation of Han State in Tibet and the Tibetan Nationalist Response

At the heart of Sino-Tibetan conflict is the endemic strain between, objectives and policies of Han dominated Maoist State on the one hand, and the subjugated Tibetan civil society under it on the other. As a result,

PRC's "notions of citizenship, patriotism and love of country which undergrid loyalty to modern state frequently face competing conceptions of identity, loyalty and legitimacy"\(^5\) in Tibet. Underlining it imminent Tibetologist Dawa Norbu writes "one of the fundamental causes of the conflict is the monoethnic character of the Han State and its serious lack of legitimacy in Tibet".\(^6\) The PRC's lack of legitimacy to rule in Tibet emerges from the systematic domination of Han State on Tibetan culture and civil society producing conditions for ethnic revolts.

After the military take over of Tibet in 1950, PRC started to tighten its grip over Tibet. Externally, in April 1954 China concluded an agreement with India regarding Tibet's political status in which India recognised China's sovereignty over Tibet, on the other hand, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) devised a 'United front' strategy based on the principles of the seventeen-point agreement signed by the Tibetan representatives in 1951 on measures to be undertaken for peaceful liberation of Tibet. These two events marked a shift in Chinese policy in Tibet.


The Chinese Communists realised the importance of communication to maintain their hold over Tibet and they were also aware of early Imperial China failure to establish its control over Tibet was because of the inaccessibility of the terrain. Thus, by the end of 1954 two motorable roads, one from Szechuan via Kham and another from Kansu and Chinaghai via Northern Tibet, were completed. On the one hand, the roads allowed for the swift movement of Chinese forces in Tibet from the Chinese mainland or the introduction of more forces in the case of rebellion, on the other the political agreement with India in 1954 that neither India nor any third country in collaboration with India could affect China's future course of action in Tibet. These events secured Chinese physical and political control over Tibet, enabling them to implement policies without any concerns for Tibetan social structure.

The treaty with India entitled 'Agreement between the Republic of India and People's Republic of China on Trade and Intercourse between Tibet region of China and India' was a major international achievement for the PRC. The treaty secured Indian recognition of China's full sovereignty in Tibet and established the doctrine of 'Peaceful Coexistence' as China's policy on relations with other Asian states. The treaty is generally known as 'Panchshila' or 'five principles of peaceful coexistence'. In fact, as events later proved, these principles were merely
a façade for Communist China's political and economic offensive in Tibet.

Shortly, after the *Panchshila* agreement, China completed *motorable roads* from mainland China to Tibet. During the First Five-Year Plan (1953-57) China poured millions of silver dollars into Tibet. Beijing spent $4,232 million on 'transportation and communication' supposedly for the whole country. The amount constituted 11.7% of the total development expenditure.\(^7\) There is evidence to suggest that most of the total amount went for road building projects. Chang Chih-I, the deputy director of the United Front Work Department of the CCP in his book on national minorities wrote:

> With respect to Communication and transportation, the greater part of the new highway construction throughout the country since Liberation has been located in the frontier regions of the Motherland and in areas inhabited by national minorities...the highway routes involving major engineering were, among others the following: Kangting-Tibet, Tsinghai-Tibet, Tsinghai-Sinkiang, Chengtu-Apa, Lanchow-langmuszu, Kuaming-Talo, Lhasa-Shigatse, Shigatse-Guantse, and Phari-Yatung.\(^8\)

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In addition to road construction, the Chinese established military installations, numerous military airfields and communication facilities. With the Consolidation of China's transport and military infrastructure coupled with the confidence of non-interference by India, the PRC, accelerated the pace of Tibet's political integration into the Han State. This marked the transition from indirect political control through the Tibetan government to direct Han administration. A Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region (PCTAR) was established which was to function under the PRC state council. The preparatory committee had to secure approval for all its actions and to refer to the state council any administrative question upon which it was unable to render a unanimous decision. All appointments to the committee, and to any subsidiary bodies that the committee created were to be referred to the state council for approval. The PCTAR spawned numerous sub committees intended to take over the affairs of administration from the Tibetan Government. The PCTAR gradually assumed most of the territorial and administrative function of the Tibetan government by setting up district and regional branches, staffed by Tibetans in symbolic positions of authority, but with Chinese personnel actually in charge. The preparatory committee was composed entirely of Tibetans with
only five Chinese members out of the total strength of fifty one. It was therefore presented as a representative body of a Tibetan autonomous administration. However, the true nature of PCTAR is revealed by the Dalai Lama after his departure from Tibet in 1959 in following terms:

Twenty of the members, although they were Tibetans, were representing the Chamdo Liberation Committee and the committee set up in Panchen Lama’s Western district. These were both purely Chinese creations. Their representatives owed their position mainly to Chinese support and in return they had to support any Chinese proposition; although the Chamdo representatives did behave more reasonably than the Panchen Lama’s. With this solid block of controlled votes, in addition to those of five Chinese members, the Committee was powerless - a mere façade of Tibetan representation behind which all effective powers was exercised by the Chinese. In fact, all basic policy was decided by another body called the Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in Tibet, which had no Tibetan members, we were allowed to discuss the minor points, but we could never make any major changes. Although, I was nominally Chairman, there was nothing much I can do. Sometimes it was almost laughable to see how the proceedings were controlled and regulated, so that plans already competed in the other committee received a pointless and empty discussion and then were passed. But often and felt embarrassed at these meetings. I saw that the Chinese had only made one Chairman in order to give an added appearance of Tibetan authority to their schemes.9

The political marginalisation of Tibetan elite by the Hans led them to believe that the Chinese control over Tibet was secure. They decided that Tibetans should therefore be included in the 'High Tide of Socialist Transformation' planned for 1956. Only Tibetans within the TAR remained free of it. The Tibetan areas of Kham and Amdo, which, in the Chinese conception were not part of "Tibet", \(^{10}\) were included in the 'socialist transition' process. Despite claims that reforms were carried out by 'peaceful means' and with the enthusiastic support of the people of the minority nationality, democratic reforms and collectivization did not proceed without resistance. However, the ways adopted for Socialist transformation and democratic reforms revealed the authoritarian character of Han rule on non-Han social groups. Democratic reforms were usually initiated through public meetings at which landlords of members of the former ruling class - excluding those who were cooperating with the united front - were subjected to public accusation

\(^{10}\) There is much controversy and confusion regarding the term "Tibet"—what it includes or excludes. To the PRC it means "Xijang"—the Tibetan Autonomous Region. To the Dalai Lama, it means Kham and Amdo besides the TAR. Since the problematic in this chapter is Han hegemony, Tibetan ethnicity and the resultant security crisis, all of which are prevalent throughout the Tibetan Plateau, we refer to both "ethnographic" and "political" Tibet, except in contact where we have TAR specifically in mind. For an historical account of early controversy regarding "ethnographic" Tibet and "Political" Tibet, see Melvyn C. Goldstein, "Change, Conflict, and Continuity among a Community of Nomadic Pastoralists: A Case Study from Western Tibet, 1950-1990," in Robert Barnett and Shirin Akiner (eds.), Resistance and Reform in Tibet, Motilal Banarsidas, New Delhi, pp. 76-87.
and 'struggle'. Struggle often meant torture and lasted for several days until victim was exhausted. Those subjected to the most severe struggle were sometimes permanently disabled or even killed. Those who survived were arrested and disappeared into prison or labour camps. Public struggle became a major ideological weapon in the hand of Han Chinese to impose their domination over the minorities through intimidation struggle as described by Bao Ruo Wang, left the accuse no defense and was intended to reform and intimidate not only the accused but all those participating the struggle.11 As Bao realised after participating in the struggle of another prisoner, "we had been struggling ourselves at the same time, mentally preparing to accept the government's position with passionate assent, whatever the merits of the man we were facing.12

Chinese activities within the TAR remained relatively benign compared to what was simultaneously taking place in eastern Tibet. The TAR was still considered immune from the 'High Tide of socialist transformation'. When the Maoist Hans introduced 'democratic reforms' in Khan and Amdo through thamzing (struggle in Tibetan), Buddhist

11 Bao Ruo-Wang (Jean Pasqualini), Prisoner of Mao, Penguin Books, New York, 1976, p.49, Bao was a French citizen of mixed French and Chinese descent who was arrested as a counter revolutionary in 1956.

12 Ibid., p.82
Tibetans who, were imbued with the ideology of non-violence, were appalled by the violence and brutality against so called exploiters, reactionaries or counter-revolutionaries, who were often regarded as traditional leaders or living Buddhas. The violence and brutality of Chinese method of social reforms served to intimidate Tibetans of all classes often leading to suicides, despair and hatred which what the Chinese had brought upon Tibetan society. Jamayang Norbu writes:

These struggles were diabolically cruel criticism meetings where children were made to accuse their parents of imaginary crimes; where farmers were made to denounce and beat up landlords; where pupils were made to degrade their teachers; where every shred of dignity in a person was torn to pieces by his people; his children and his loved ones. Old Lamas were made to have sex with prostitutes in public. And often the accused was beaten, spat and urinated upon. Every act of degradation was heaped upon him - and it killed him in more ways than one. When someone was through in the *thamzing* session, no one ever spoke of him again. He was no martyr for the people, because the people had killed him. His death lay in the hands of those who should have honoured and remembered him; but in their guilt, the people tried to forget him and the shameful past they had played in his degradation.\(^\text{13}\)

Buddhism as a fundamental identity symbol for the Tibetans came under sustained attack because Buddhist Monasteries as power centres

were considered as one of the main institutional obstacles to Han control over Tibet.

Tibetans as a social category with their own value-system, social and political organisations empowered by Buddhism did not share the Confucian culture with the Hans nor did they function within the Confucian social structure. Tibet has been described by specialist and commoners in the following manner. Professor R.A. Stein of College de France holds that Tibetan civilization is comparable to other "great civilization of Europe and the East".14 Professor Hajime Nakamura of the University of Tokyo finds ‘an element of universality’ in Tibetan religious culture, which he says, has spread to Bhutan, China, Ladakh, Manchuria, Mongolia, Nepal, Russia and to Sikkim since the late medieval times15. Italian Tibetologist, the late professor Giuseppe Tucci described Tibet as full blown case of Mahayana Tantric Buddhist cultural category that was hard to find in other parts of Asia.16 Michel Piessel, a French Tibetologist in an interview given to Tibetan Review observed: "Tibet is not only an ethnic group but civilization. The Tibetans stand

distinctly from the Chinese with whom they have nothing in common".17 A young Tibetan commoner interviewed in a refugee camp in Nepal said "The Chinese say Tibet is part of China, but we look different, we do not eat the same, we do not speak the same language and they treat us differently, so we never feel that we're part of China".18 Such a portrait of the socio-cultural world of the Tibetan population by Tibetologists and commoners "not merely as an ethnic group but essentially as a distinct cultural and civilizational category might imply that Tibet had been an ancient nation in pre-modern world like other civilizational Unit".19

The so-called 'democratic reforms' introduced in Tibet which included public denunciation and thamzing of respected leaders and revered lamas led to mass discontent among the Tibetans. Revolts in eastern Tibet soon assumed major proportions, with the Tibetans achieving initial successes against the PLA until the Chinese introduced overwhelming number of troops.

In early 1957, in order to prevent the spread of revolt to Central Tibet and to secure the return of Dalai Lama from a visit to India where he had threatened to seek exile, Mao promised 'no reforms' for the

17 Tibetan Review, vol.8, no.5, May-June, 1993, pp.10-13
18 Tibetan Review, vol. XXXIV, no.8, August 1999, p.20
19 Dawa Norbu, op.cit., no.6, p.299.
Tibetans within the TAR for the next one or two five-year plans if the Tibetans themselves did not want reforms. However, this promise, like the provisions of the ‘Seventeen point agreement’, did not apply to eastern Tibet. Once the Dalai Lama had returned, ‘democratic reforms were renewed in Eastern Tibet. Despite the revolt in Eastern Tibet, and actually as a means of quelling the revolt, collectivization was introduced in Eastern, Tibet during the Great Leap forward in 1958’.

The Chinese did not decrease the pace of socialist transformation in the face of rebellion. Democratic reforms were an effective means of eliminating Tibetan leadership, while collectivization increased Chinese control over the Tibetan population. A slogan of the time reveals the regimentation and militarist frenzy that characterized that period: "Military organisation, Turn action into struggle, collectize life!" Collectivization, which was equivalent to force and detention in a circumscribed area, was employed to control Tibetans and to prevent their contact with the resistance. However the pursuit of collectivization and democratic reforms only intensified revolt in Eastern Tibet. The revolt in Eastern Tibet soon especially in Kham and Amdo, assumed

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major proportions. The revolt in Amdo, although involving a large proportion of Tibetan population was suppressed due to preponderance of force available to the Chinese. By the end of 1957 the Chinese had committed eight PLA division and at least 1,50,000 men to the suppression of the revolt in Eastern Tibet. The crisis and chaos and Chinese repression in Eastern Tibet shifted the location of revolt to central Tibet by 1958. The final showdown between the Tibetans and the Chinese culminated in Lhasa in March 1959 when rumors that the Chinese were planning to kidnap the Dalai Lama drew large number of Tibetans to protect their leader. Days of fighting ensued between the Tibetan resistance and Chinese troops in which thousands of Tibetans were killed. The 'Tibetan uprising' was put down and martial law was imposed.

The Lhasa revolt was a national uprising against the Chinese presence in Tibet. The PLA finally put down the revolt which was undeniably popular pro-independence in character. Many thousand were reportedly killed in the process; the streets to Lhasa were littered with bodies, whose disposal took several days.


Tibetan estimates of the number killed in the Lhasa revolt vary from 5000 to 10,000, with as many as 20,000 arrested after the revolt. Chinese statistics office member of Tibetan's “eliminated” by the PLA in the TAR during and after the revolt. A document captured by the Tibetan Resistance in 1966, entitled “Political Situation in Tibet and Basic Education document, of People's Liberation Army Political Bureau, 10th January 1960 reads, “People's Liberation Army activists under the Party control with local resident Tibetan population eliminated 87,000 enemies in the rebellion from March 1959 to the beginning of October 1960”.

The causality figure itself indicates the scale of uprising, fighting, consequent death and dislocation in Tibet. It has been described by a very articulate Tibetan refugee elite in the following terms:

“Comparable in Magnitude to the events in Afghanistan following the Soviet invasion. Though the effect of the uprising on China has not been as great as that of Afghan Conflict on the Russian People, especially since propaganda ensured that the Chinese people would be properly ignorant of it, the uprising has remained the one persistent running sure that has constantly spoiled Chain’s otherwise successful efforts at

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keeping up appearances before the eyes of the world.\(^{25}\) Another Western Commentator Considered that the Tibetan resistant produced “the gravest episode of initial disorder [in people's Republic of China] prior to the cultural revolution.\(^ {26}\)

Tibetan Resistance against the invading Chinese forces in the late 1940s and early 1950s was not an uncommon phenomenon in Eastern and North-Eastern Tibet. But the general uprising in 1959 against the Chinese did manage to succeed in bringing about a co-ordination militancy action, especially, when one considers that this attempt at co-ordination had to cover many hundreds of miles of mountain wilderness, without even basic communication equipment, road or motorised transport, it is remarkable that such a wide spread rebellion should have successfully taken place, more or less around the agreed upon. Perhaps, external international brought about in-group cohesiveness stitched together by Buddhism. The Khambas of the eastern Tibet called their resistance movement, “the volunteer Army to defend Buddhism”. It reflects the ideological nature of the uprising. Dawa Norbu considers that the Khamba uprising was in defence of Tibetan Buddhist values and of


the political and sacred institutions founded upon such values. He has explained the uprising in the following terms:

"As long as the Chinese did not temper with the objectively functioning social system and the value systems still considered sacred by the members of that society, as happened on outer Tibet, there was no revolt, although the unprecedented Chinese presence in the country caused great resentment and anxiety. But the moment the Chinese tried to alter the functioning of Sacred Social System in Inner Tibet which they considered *de jure* China proper, the revolt began." 27

The Buddhist ideology on which the revolt was based gave it a sufficient popular appeal to transcend the borders of Eastern Tibet and to ignite nationalist passions against the Chinese rule even in Tibet Autonomous region. The horizontal movement of Tibetan revolt moving from Eastern to TAR gave it a national character. The Tibetan revolt ultimately refuted China’s claim that Tibet constituted an integral part of China or that it was “peacefully liberated”.

Although the PLA eliminated organised Tibetan resistance, the revolt and the fight of the Dalai Lama were an international

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embarrassment for the Chinese. Interestingly, during the 1959 uprising, Mao cabled the PLA commanding Officer in Tibet and asked but one question: Did the Dalai Lama escape? The Officer conveyed that the Dalai Lama had indeed escaped. Mao cabled back, "Then we've lost". Clearly, Dalai Lama was still important for Han rule in Tibet. Han power elite in Communist China with a deep 'historical consciousness' were tutored by Han nationalist Wang Fo-Chih (1619-1692) in following words:

"Since the forming of groups is inherent in human nature and the establishment of a ruler is for the purpose of protecting the group, it is logical and necessary for the group to govern itself. Each race should be controlled by its own ruler, and should never allow any encroachment by an alien race". In Tibetan case, Mao was quick to realise the symbolic significance of the Dalai Lama to legitimise the alieness of Han rule. Sure enough only Dalai Lama as incarnation of Buddha could structure many crucial relationship between Tibetan civil society and the 'Non-Coercive regime'; both drawing its moral force from Buddhism. On the contrary, the Han administrative, bureaucratic and coercive authority

structures lacked legitimacy to regulate relationship between civil society and public authority in Tibet, fundamentally for being 'Han' and not 'Tibetan'.

At any rate Chinese revolution was essentially a Han affair. As Benedict Anderson writes “Since the second world war, every successful revolution has defined itself in national terms—the People's Republic of China, the socialist Republic of Vietnam and so forth”. Thus, we find Chairman Mao in 1938, describing the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as “party of the great Chinese nation...flesh of its flesh and blood of its blood...our great Chinese nation, with its long history, is unconquerable. Viewed from the perspective CCP turns into a Han monolith backed by totalitarian coercive apparatus to suppress any voice of dissent.

The Tibetan revolt that culminated in Lhasa in March 1959 was only the climax of a process set in motion by the forcible occupation of Tibet. It also exposed the hollowness of PRC' claims over Tibet being an integral part of China to minimize any history of Tibet as country separated from China.

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Since, the suppression of Tibetan revolt the Chinese authorities assumed direct control over Tibet and drastically accelerated the peace of revolutionary change. This included collectivisation and an attempt to build up a network of Tibetan Party and government cadres. The Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) was established in 1965 but Han officials continued to dominate the most senior chlous of the party. Tibetans were organised into Mutual Aid Teams (MAT) to work on irrigation, water conservation, land reclamation and afforestation projects. For the Chinese, however, the primary purpose of MATs was to gain control over Tibetan agricultural production and distribution. Tibetans report that the majority of the harvest was confiscated under the name of a variety of ‘Voluntary’ taxes, or ‘bought’ without actual compensation. Tibetans received, only a ration, much as was the case in higher stage collectives in the Chinese interior. Despite claimed increases in production, Tibetans received less since the majority of agricultural produce was confiscated by the Chinese. Thousands of Tibetans starved. Meanwhile, the Cultural Revolution (1966-69) started with the Maoist project of the destruction of four ancient (rnyinpu-bzhi): ancient ideas, ancient culture, ancient traditions and ancient customs. Dawa Norbu has described the Maoist Slogan of destroying four ancients in the following terms:

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These four ancient abounded in Tibetan Society, pervading almost every sphere of life. They were seen ideologically, culturally and politically—as obstacles to Tibet becoming an integral part of China. The culture revolution was seen as a golden opportunity for making this Chinese dream of the sinicization of Tibetans come true complete with revolutionary backing and Maoist ideological legitimation... Mao Zedong appeared as a greatest Marxist thinker, the greatest Chinese revolutionary, and so on. Mao was simply deified as Buddha. But the problem with Mao and his cultural revolution was that they had strong Han cultural dimensions which were equated in Tibet with modernity, progress and revolution."34

The Red guards unleashed by Mao went on a space of attacking temples and monasteries in Lhasa after carting away the valuable contents of rich temples such as Tsughak Khang, Ramoche, Norbulinka, Tengyching, Zong kyap, Lukhang etc.35 The Red guards destroyed nearly 95 percent of Tibetan Buddhist Monitions, religious Institutions and even private chapels. During the Cultural Revolution, these most distinguishing symbols of Tibetan Culture and National identity were to be eradicated.

35 Ibid., p.274
Other aspects of Tibetan culture also came under systematic attack during the Cultural Revolution. All Tibetan customs, traditions, songs and dance even language were to be replaced by Chinese (read Han) style. Tibetans were required to be dressed like Chinese, cut these long hair short in the Chinese style sing songs in praise of Mao in Chinese.

One may well ask what have old songs, dances and traditional hair styles got to do with revolution, if not a systematic attempt to Sinicize the Tibetans in the name of cultural Revolution? If fact, Cultural Revolution in Tibet explicitly equated ‘revolution, progress and modernity’ with Han cultural imperialism.

The enormity of destruction in Tibet during the Cultural Revolution and later has been described as ‘the graveyard of murdered civilization’ by the Western journalist.

After Mao's Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, Deng xiaoping liberalization of Chinese economy and society since 1979 was a welcome change for the Tibetans. Socio-economic liberalization anticipated to defuse the remnants of Tibetan discontent with the Chinese rule. For Tibetans, however, economic liberalization, accompanied by a slight political freedom, allowed for the expression of shared identity and culture, including the common experience of oppression for the first time
since 1959. Once again the politically conscious sections of the Tibetan population revolted in the late 1980s against the Han domination.

The structural changes in Tibetan Society that followed decolletivisation and reforms of 1980s, including the relaxation of social restrictions, reconstruction of religious monuments and monasteries. These changes have important political significance for the Tibetan revolt in the late 80s. The reconstructed monasteries during the liberalization again emerged as a natural institution for roping solidarity among they younger generation of Tibetans with a common experience of Chinese rule.

A few of the most famous monasteries were restored at government expense. In Lhasa the Jokhang, Drepung and Sera were restored. The other monasteries to be restored with state funds were Tashilhunpo, Sakya, Gyantse and Shalu in Tsang; Derge and Chamdo in Kham and Kumbum and Labrang in Tashikyil in Amdo.\textsuperscript{36} In 1982, the Chinese government announced plans to restore an additional 53 large or historic monasteries, including the main temples of Tibet's four primary religious sects.\textsuperscript{37} Tibetans of all age flocked to the newly reopened

\textsuperscript{36} "Tibet Renovates Temples and Monasteries," \textit{Beijing Review}, 28th April 1980, p.29.

temples and monasteries and enthusiastically devoted their labour and economic resources when no one was allowed to contribute money to the revival of religion. Around 90,000 Tibetans pilgrims from all over the Tibetan plateau visited Jokhang every month.38

The rebuilt monasteries attracted former and new monks. Many Tibetans, alienated by the continuing propaganda and denigration of Tibetan Culture encountered in Chinese schools, began to send their children to the monks for schooling. Monasteries became the locus of a Tibetan cultural and political revival because of the symbolism of Buddhism and religious institutions in Tibetan national identity. In other words, Tibetan social life had once again started to form around relationships beyond the reach of the state and frequently in opposition to it.

Internationally, the internal liberalization initiated by PRC after the culture revolution coincided with Beijing’s attempt to initiate a dialogue with Dalai Lama’s government in exile based in Dharamsala in India. Between 1979 to 1985 five fact finding delegations were sent by the Dalai Lama to Tibet in order to assess the situation in Tibet. This ‘delegation diplomacy’, had a dramatic impact on Tibetan nationalist

revival. Of particular importance is the so-called ‘Lhasa incident’ of 25th July 1980. This occurred during the Dalai Lama's second delegation visit to Lhasa. “To see the delegates, a large crowd gathered in front of the guest house where the delegates were staying. Perhaps being inspired by the crowd; one of the delegates shouted. ‘Tibet is independent' and the crowd responded emotionally. This was the second incident of its kind. During the first delegation's visit to Lhasa, an old woman had made similar declaration,” 39

This informal contact heightened the Tibetan, of ethnic solidarity by exposing them to a reality beyond that of Chinese propaganda in the age of liberalization. It also emboldened them to challenge the Chinese rule. The Tibetan revolt (87-90) took place in the above discussed domestic and later national context. The first demonstrations started in 1987 by a handful of monks and nuns and in the following two years there were at least two dozen further demonstrations and protest activities including the distribution of political literature, the mounting of wall posters and the creation of a loosely knit network of underground organisations. As the demonstrations continued and the scope of unrest broadened throughout 1988 and into 1989 the campaign went through several phases. The current wave of unrest broke when 21 monks from

39 Dawa Norbu, op.cit., no.34., p.281.
Drepung monastery joined by five laymen marched around the Bakhor (the circumambulation route around Lhasa’s Jokhang Temple) in support of Dalai Lama on 27th September 1987. They were later accused of having carried the ‘Snow mountains and lions' flag, the prohibited Tibetan national flag, and of having shouted Tibetan independence slogans. The demonstration was blamed on the influence of foreigners and the work of saboteurs sent by the ‘Dalai Clique' to confuse and trick the Tibetan masses. This served only to arouse. Tibetan resentment and set the stage for further protests. On 1st October 1987, China’s national day and the anniversary of the foundation of People's Republic of China monks from Sera, Jokhang and Nechung along with lay Tibetans started shouting independence slogans. Three monks and three Tibetans were shot dead in cold blood by the Chinese and several others were injured.

To understand the Tibetan revolt of late eighties, it is important to emphasise the resonance of the religion in Sino-Tibetan politics. Although, the struggle between the two sides is over sovereignty and national identity, the battleground on which that struggle is fought is religion. More specifically, it is the great festivals and anniversaries of


the Tibetan religious calendar that provide the context and Landmarks for the central dispute between the Tibetans and the Chinese. It is perhaps, significant, therefore, that the first major demonstration of the current wave of unrest broke out in front of the Jokhang on the same day and at the same time as a secular, official anniversary was being staged in the Norbulingka. (Although the uprising in 1959 focussed on the Norbulingka, the summer palace of the Dalai Lama, the centre of 1987-90 protests became the Jokhang temple. The Tibetan pro-independence activists had made the Jokhang the political focus of Tibet by staging all the nationalist demonstrations. In contrast, the Chinese vision of anniversaries in the reform era has always been centred on the Norbulingka, which in comparison with Jokhang (Potala) can be seen as the secular seat of the Dalai Lama. It is not revered by devotees to the same degree as an object of pilgrimage or circumambulation. It is at the Norbulingka that the Chinese cadres have since the early 1980s staged official celebrations, and where they have marked official events such as Teacher's Day and folkloric events like Shoton [the Yoghurt festival] by hosting picnics, giving long speeches on reforms and organising performances by local folk-dance troupes in the park. The events at the Norbulingka have thus represented the Chinese attempt to reconstruct on the site of the 1959 uprising an officially acceptable and specifically secular tradition of Tibetan anniversaries. This was October 1st, 1987,
China's National Day and the anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. While the leading Chinese officials in Tibet were giving speeches at the Norbulingka about the thirty-eight years since the founding of the PRC 3000 Tibetans were burning down a small police station overlooking the Jokhang three kilometers away.\(^{42}\) Also, on the 27th September 1987 twenty-one monks from Drepung monastery joined by five laymen marched around the Bakhor (the circumambulation route around Lhasa's Jokhang temple) in support of Dalai Lama.\(^{43}\)

Symbolically, the rejection of Norbulingka as a site of protest was a rejection of the secular edifice that China had created in its reconstruction of traditional and its rebuilding of Lhasa.\(^{44}\) A year later the authorities took steps to strengthen the interpretation of October 1\(^{st}\) as a secular, specifically Chinese anniversary, even trying to revalidate it by ascribing Tibetan folk superstitions to the day rather than by allowing the


\(^{43}\) "Demonstrations Disrupt Peace in Lhasa", Beijing Review, 12th October 1987, p.5

\(^{44}\) This attempt to reconstruct a tradition has a more visible parallel in the concrete rebuilding of the city of Lhasa itself, so that Chinese-style buildings now cover an area twenty times greater than the portion of the city that is still Tibetan in its architecture or history.
pro-independence movement to claim it as a nationalist anniversary.\textsuperscript{45} These attempts made little headway against the interpretation of the day that had been created by the Tibetan demonstrators.

Again, perhaps unaware of the power of symbolism, the Chinese themselves nourished the idea of *Chos-srid Zung-'bril*\textsuperscript{46} in Tibet by staking the success of their reforms on the visible display of religious tolerance. In 1986 in a major ceremony at the Jokhang, the Chinese staged their most ambitious exhibition of reform by allowing the monks to hold for the first time in twenty years the Monlam.\textsuperscript{47} As a religious event, this celebration had to be held at the Jokhang, not at Norbulingka. It was in any case essential for the authorities to show that their liberalisation included the religious establishment. Therefore, In 1988 it

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{45} "over the past few days, major organisations and masses in Lhasa's urban areas have taken active part in doing through cleaning and vying for non-staple food to make preparations of the National Day Celebrations in a joyous atmosphere.... Some of the residents have hung amulets by symbolising a good luck on their doors and are ready to celebrate the National Day happily. Amulets and cleaning are traditional characteristics of New Year celebrations. The National Day events are referred to throughout as a 'festival' and the broadcast ended with a warning that there would be no leniency for any splittists who 'take advantage of the festival. "Lhasa Public Prepares for National Day", Radio Lhasa, September 29, 1988, in SWB, FE/0273, B2/8, October 4\textsuperscript{th} 1988.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{46} Religion and politics combined
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{47} The People's Government of the Tibet Autonomous Region decided to reopen the grand prayer ceremony festival *Monlam* which had been closed for 20 years since the beginning of cultural Revolution in 1966.
\end{quote}
became imperative for the Chinese Government to let the Monlam festival take place, as it had in the previous two years, to show to the world at large that its liberalisation policy in Tibet remained intact despite the 1987 demonstrations. The Tibetans immediately realising the symbolic potential of the festival broke into a major demonstration on the last day of the festival. The protests culminated raiding into the raid of Jokhang by the People’s Armed Police (PAP) when at least five people were shot dead.48

This was not a good move for a government bent on showing its commitment to religious tolerance. In a way, one could say the Chinese were forced on that day to play out again in miniature, on a small but highly visible stage, their original invasion of Tibet.

In 1989 the first anniversary of the demonstrations at the end of Monlam Festival was marked initially by a small demonstration of less than forty people. The incident escalated into three days of widespread protest and unrest when police opened fire on the group, thirty minutes after they had begun to chant pro-independence slogans; one Hong Kong

48 The Panchen lama said in a television interview in April 1988 that, apart from causalities among members of the security forces, five people had been killed in the protest. ‘NPC Deputies Ngapoi, Bangven Meet Press’, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) CHI-88-064, April 4th 1988 quoted in Asia Watch, Evading Security, July 1988, p.20.
paper later quoted an unnamed Chinese official as saying that 250 Tibetans had been killed by police in the days that followed. It was at the end of those three days that martial law was declared.

The declaration of martial law in Lhasa in March 1989 witnessed increasing harsh measures necessary to suppress dissent. The responsibility for maintaining order in Lhasa was assumed directly by the PLA. Display of force troops, armoured personal carrier and military check points became a regular feature of the life in Lhasa.

The completion of first year of imposition of Martial law in 1990 in Lhasa was an occasion for the Tibetans to protest against the Chinese rule. But the Chinese authorities themselves marked it in a distinctive way by staging the largest display of military hardware seen in the city for several years. The display included 1800 armed troops, fifty lorries, twelve field guns, five armoured personnel carriers and five multiple rocket launchers. Following the pattern of Tibetan revolts falling on anniversary and religious festivals, the Chinese authorities seem to have thought that the start of second year of martial law was the most likely occasion for the Tibetan protest. And they made sure that it was marked in a way they wanted rather than as the Tibetans might have preferred.

Paradoxically, they fell into something of a trap in doing so. The Tibetans may have failed to express their protest on that day, but the Chinese authorities themselves demonstrated in a highly visible way exactly the root cause of Tibetan protest: The Chinese presence in Tibet. This presence is at the core of nationalist discontent, and has been the subject of the demands of almost all the protests that have taken place in Tibet Han dominated PLA\(^{50}\) and other authority structures in Tibet is the most obvious embodiment of that presence. The 1800 troops and the multiple rocket launchers paraded on the streets of Lhasa effectively vitiated China’s claim that the dissident element in Tibet consisted ‘a handful of splittists.’

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\(^{50}\) The Chinese People’s Liberation Army is composed overwhelmingly of ethnic Han Chinese. When the Chinese communists came to power in 1949 they inherited an age-old problem for Chinese leaders: how to deal with non-Han ethnic groups such as Mongols, Tibetans, Uighurs, Kazakhs located at China’s sensitive border regions. The Chinese communists were firmly committed to national security and defence by bringing non-Han ethnic minorities into China’s Han-Shaped political, economic and social framework used PLA for the maintenance of both internal and external security. This dual internal external security role played by the PLA in minority areas can been seen in Tibet. For example during the Tibetan revolt of 1959 and 1989 the PLA was called upon to supress the Tibetan rebels. The PLA continued to take an active role in Tibet as border tension with India mounted and erupted into an open conflict in 1962. Since that time the PLA has been intimately involved in decision-making in Tibet, most of Tibet’s leaders are Han military officers or have close connection with the military. Dewitt C. Ellinwood and Cynthia H. Enloe, *Ethnicity and Military in Asia*, Transaction Books, New Brunswick, London, 1981, pp, 176-183.
Conclusions

In the light of these events the Chinese authorities appeared to have become involved in a struggle over symbols in which they were constantly caught on defensive. Although Party Strategy has always laid a premium on the exhaustive re-writing of history, (viz. Historically, Tibet has been past of china ---- so on) Chinese officials seemed unable to contain the historical resonances which the Tibetan nationalists evoked by their use of religious and nationalist anniversaries. The Chinese position on religious tolerance was progressively invalidated as they found it hard to separate the attack on Tibetan nationalism from that on the politio-religions symbols used by pro-independence movements.

The Tibetan revolts of 1959 and late 1980s poses a question mark on China’s self-proclaimed ability to accommodate a measure of religious and ethnic identify. The Tibetan have led the Han state into an area rich in symbolism where, step by step, the claims of Chinese liberalisation was stripped of value and exposed as rhetoric.

Finally, judging by the current history of Tibetan revolt against Chinese domination, we can say that Tibetan resentment sometimes dormant as sometimes surfacing, depending on the Chinese policy in Tibet-seems nevertheless. The strange paradox of this popular resentment
which might perhaps explain its veracity is that it expresses itself during a period of leniency and relative freedom. In the 1950s the Chinese rule was characterised by extremely liberal policy and yet resulted in 1959 rebellion. Since 1980, pragmatic Chinese leadership publicly acknowledged the Red Guard excesses in Tibet and introduced a liberal policy reminiscent of the 1950s. Again, the relative freedom was used to revolt against the Chinese rule in late September and early October 1987. The manner and timing of such anti-Chinese revolts indicate that the Tibetan population at large is far from reconciled with the Chinese rule; no amount of appeasement on the part of the Chinese rules so far has satisfied the fundamental Tibetan resentment against unprecedented Chinese dominance in Tibet. In concrete terms the ethnicization of state power in Lhasa and Beijing degenerated into Han political and cultural hegemony in a non-revolutionary Tibetan situation. Dawa Norbu writes: "A minority ethnic group, which does not share the value-system and social structure of the dominant ethnic group, is more likely to have its own social, if not political, identity which competes and even conflicts with the official national identity".\footnote{Dawa Norbu, op.cit., no.29, p.74.} He also points out that “In China the will of the dominant nation is openly imposed upon the national
minorities as if it were the will of all nationalities.\textsuperscript{52} Therefore, the crux of the problem in Tibet is Han domination in the name of 'revolution', 'progress', and 'liberation'.