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# Comment: Tibet Today--Propaganda, Record and Policy

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# TIBET TODAY: PROPAGANDA, RECORD AND POLICY

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## On Propaganda

We associate the prose of John F. Avedon with the recent political history of Tibet, in particular with the suffering and struggle of the Tibetan people within the polity of China since 1950. Overall Avedon's account, published in Volume 7, Nos. 2/3 of The Himalayan Research Bulletin, implies that the position of Tibetans is now extreme, as bad if not worse than before the recent reforms of 1978 and 1980. In places he actually uses the language of the holocaust, the words 'final solution,' to refer to current Chinese policies.

As a journalist, Avedon deals with issues and events significant today. His writing is intended for a general audience, for whom the rhetorical presentation of a case is part of the power-play and politics of popular debate. This is to a degree justified in order to alert pressure groups or the public at large to the events or issues at hand. Here a point is made, not perhaps because it is likely to be judged correct by the canons of science or scholarship in the fullness of time, but because it represents the best guess, from a particular standpoint, when a report or commentary was called for. Sometimes, when there are applied as well as purely academic criteria, there are problems of accuracy. In this situation a person concerned with facts has to be careful, as it is a short-step from putting something down because there is reasonable evidence that it is true, to putting it down because it may be true and because it may be of help to what is seen as the case at hand.

I should be explicit on one point here. The historical record is clear that the Tibetan people have suffered terribly since 1959, and that the Chinese have no more justification for their actions there than did the European powers against black Africans or native Americans in their own colonial actions since the 16th century. However, it is reasonably clear that the material circumstances of Tibetans have improved quite significantly since the reforms of 1980, if for no other reason than because they were so bad before. Moreover, I do not think that the present fluctuations and inconsistencies in their policy to Tibet by China merit the extreme accusations of Avedon.

This early history is known to some within the Chinese Central Communist Party, who have made public statements to the same. It is also known to most of the readers of The Himalayan Research Bulletin. By and large, this readership has both the critical sophistication, and the particular cultural and historical knowledge, to point to the inaccuracies of propaganda that are still presented by some in the Chinese Central Communist Party. If anything, the readership of The Himalayan Research Bulletin is one of the few categories of people whom one can be reasonably sure does not need propaganda to draw its attention to the issue of Tibet. Yet The Himalayan Research Bulletin is unlikely to be read by the public at large, nor is it likely to be read widely by those directly concerned with policy decisions on Tibet; furthermore, Avedon's speech has already been heard by the United States Senate. This raises the question of what, beyond an expression of solidarity and concern among ourselves, is the effect of publishing it here?

The little collective power that academics have comes, perhaps, because we may be thought of as objective experts. We look at events and information in their complexity, and come up with something that we label 'the truth.' Such truths may use the same material as journalism, but we question it in slightly different ways and with slightly different goals to those of even a committed journalist. It is reasonable to suppose that if an academic

journal has any wider political function at all, then it is to set the relative truth of the facts on record as best it can, without either exclusion or exaggeration.

And this is the crux of the issue of John F. Avedon's presentation. To publish such a speech in a bulletin for scholarly exchange on research gives it a further legitimacy and currency as 'the truth' in our sense, beyond the conventions of journalism. It might appear unfair to the author to consider it by scholastic criteria: such standards would seem to miss the main point, namely that it is a statement for the human rights of Tibetans rather than an academic paper. Yet such points have to be made now, just because of the setting. An academic bulletin, if it is to remain as such, should not be just swept along by events and interpretations, but has to examine issues by its own standards.

One has to be especially wary about crying out "wolf." If one does so too loosely, then there is a danger of The Himalayan Research Bulletin (and its contributors) no longer being taken at face value in serious circles. More importantly, to allow inaccuracies to be put forward unchallenged in the name of academic research may not advance the cause of Tibet. Even if a propaganda gain for Tibetan nationalism is the correct focus for this cause at the moment, it might be very easy for such an advance to be turned around the other way: a few exaggerations in Avedon's work could be pointed to in public, and then by analogy the whole Tibetan case and authority of contributors to the Bulletin to comment on them could be dismissed.

Ultimately, the main issue is not of scholasticism but one of human rights, of nationality bias and dominance of Han over Tibetan. A level statement of the facts as best they can be known by our professional standards, that is informed public debate, is surely the best way we can help this process. Here there are perhaps three main areas for comment and observation. First, patterns of changes in regional demography, in effect asking questions about immigration and resettlement by Han Chinese in traditionally Tibetan areas: this is extremely important as such "facts on the ground" in the world of politics constitute legitimation for fundamental changes. Secondly, examining discrimination and bias in the exercise of political power, that is unequal national access to the new state apparatus and the facilities and material benefits of the modern economy; these may be both inequitable in themselves and set in process further structural differentiation between the groups. Thirdly, by looking at the acculturation that comes from modernity, and asking to what degree this modernity unnecessarily bears a Chinese rather than a Tibetan stamp. In addition, such academic work should unmask any false claims and errors of analysis, whether these come from Chinese or Tibetan nationalist sources, or from other researchers and scholars.[1]

What then is the evidence for Avedon's claims as to the 'final solution?' The image or simile of Tibet as one huge prison-camp, one massive gulag or lager, may well be useful to make outsiders comprehend some aspects of Tibet's recent history. The camps of Stalin's Russia were in some ways remarkably similar to those of Hitler's Germany: one should not suppose that those of China in the sixties were different in any fundamental form. Amdo, or Qinghai as the Chinese know it, just happens to be where the Chinese center their own gulag. As various survivors of gulags elsewhere, such as Solzhenitsyn and Primo Levi, have recorded, one of the main effects of such concentration-camp methods is to destroy the will to protest, that is, it leaves individuals unable to do anything other than focus on immediate animal survival.

Yet more than once recently, Tibetans have protested collectively in Lhasa against Chinese rule. Whatever repressions and reprisals are taking place now, Tibetans are not

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[1]I have commented on these general issues, and the collection of field data as they effect China's published statistics, elsewhere. Graham E. Clarke, "China's Reforms of Tibet, and their Effects on Pastoralism," IDS Discussion Paper, No. 237, Nov. 1987).

suffering from extreme malnourishment and starvation as did prisoners in the 'gulag archipelago' of Stalin's Russia, and as many of them did prior to 1978 themselves. And it is not the Tibetans who live in ghettos, but quite ironically it is the Chinese who, by and large, live in cantonments. Tibetans are not trucked and railroaded across Asia, gassed and cremated, at rates of 5,000 a day, as were the Jewish people in Europe in the final years of the Nazi Third Reich. While we do not have accurate figures on recent imprisonments,[2] estimates of deaths, even from Tibetan nationalists, are far lower than those for recent Palestinian deaths on the West Bank and Gaza strip.[3] Tragically wrong, yes: but this is not the 'Final Solution' as we may be made to think, and Avedon should not use phrases quite so lightly that conjure up that extreme horror.

Overall, though Avedon normally purports to be describing the situation that has resulted from the reforms of 1978 and 1980, his prose very much recalls the destitution prior to 1978. In his account there is a great deal of this logical 'slippage' from events and accounts before these dates, times which all admit were hellish, to the present-day. This tempts our sense of outrage and sadness to transfer from the one to the other, which in turn obscures any objective consideration of the record of recent changes, and any reasonable debate on political and policy alternatives.

## The Record

Much of Avedon's data and some of his interpretations of this recent period are either inaccurate and of unsure provenance, or contain unwarranted assumptions and present a partial picture. I am not going to go through all the factual errors, nor the uncertainties of definition which dog the work throughout, but will treat some of the main points, such as the historical record, the way he uses numbers, and general problems of interpretation of data.

First, there is an error of sequence in Avedon's treatment of the history of events leading up to Chinese reforms. He writes that China stopped its dialogue with Tibet as the result of riots attendant on the visits of the Dalai Lama's delegations to Tibet, here implying that this signified the beginning of a decline which has continued up until the present day. This is wrong. Today the Dalai Lama, in letting it be known that he is pursuing a 'Middle Way,' still clearly admits to lines of exchange and dialogue.

The clear historical sequence and obvious interpretation is that the reports of these visits of the Tibetan Government in Exiles' Delegations alerted Beijing to some of the problems, and in part were responsible for the visit of officials of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party to Tibet to investigate conditions in 'western areas' in 1980.[4] The outcome of this last was the specific reforms for Tibet, Qinghai and Gansu of 1980 (as distinct from the general pan-China post-1978 reform).[5] As well as advocating economic liberalization, these reforms proposed greater local autonomy, respect for local conditions, the use of local personnel in administration, and a restoration of local trade patterns.

The wisdom of the degree of autonomy intended there for Tibet was questioned in China in late 1986, at the time of the replacement of Hu Yaobang from the position of

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[2]Recent speculations are upwards of 2,000 in the Lhasa area.

[3]Figures distributed by the Dalai Lama's administration estimate less than 100 for the past year.

[4]Hu Yaobung and Wang Li.

[5]Clarke 1987, loc. cit., from People's Republic China National Yearbooks, 1981, 1985.

General Secretary of the Chinese Communist party. Following this, the political reforms that could have grown out of economic liberalization have been delayed or curtailed. There have been violent and repressive police, and perhaps military, actions against Tibetans since that time, especially in the capital. There is little information on whether there has been a slowdown in the implementation of the reforms, or whether there have been alterations in policies and plans at the economic and political levels.

Secondly, there are the numbers, statistics being very important in modern propaganda. I am sometimes asked whether it is true or not that one million Tibetans have died at the hand of the Chinese. I have tried to reply as follows: many Tibetans died from fighting, from ill-treatment in camps, or just from food shortages, from 1950 up until the late cultural revolution in 1978; this figure of one million (or rather 1.2 million) is the figure circulated by the Dalai Lama's sources. The original baseline figures are estimates from a time when there were no modern census records, and the current figures for Tibet come from Chinese statistics the absolute basis of which is unclear: the million is obtained by subtracting the one from the other. Hence it is difficult to be sure. We could be talking of less than half that figure; or we could be talking of half again as many.

I once asked another journalist, also well-known for his publications on Tibet, how he knew that around 6,000 monasteries had been destroyed in the cultural revolution, this being the figure in general circulation. For example, did the definition of monastery imply a monastic complex, or separate temples and shrines; did it include the temples of household monks and lineage priests (Tib. ser-khyim); what were the sources and records and were there any assumptions in the calculation? The only answer I received was that this was the generally accepted figure. In other words, this was a figure well-known for being well-known repeated from one journalistic 'source' to another, rather than having any clear and independent basis. Certain pieces of information, presumed to be hard data, if published once gain a certain currency and are repeated endlessly.

Avedon's figures do not always clearly tally with other published primary records from where they might be expected to derive. For example, in at least some Chinese sources (e.g. People's Republic of China Yearbook, 1985), there are now fourteen autonomous Tibetan prefectures. Avedon refers to eleven, which at some time may have been the case: but he gives us neither date nor source. One suspects that numbers sometimes are given not because the author knows them to be factually correct, but because such data is expected to be found in a 'scientific' report (in the same way as in development reports), quite separate from any possibility of finding out whether they are true or not. Such appearances of numeracy are a part of the received culture of the twentieth century documentation. This is not to say that many of Avedon's figures are not 'right' in one way or another, but that at the very least they require some source, caution and interpretation. For us to read that "6,254 monasteries have been destroyed" is to lend a spurious air of empirical accuracy to data that cannot be approached with such an unqualified air of precision.

This is especially so with demographic data. Here, just to follow what areas are being referred to on a map one has to know the administrative and historical context. The years 1950 and 1959 are important, as since 1950 the eastern provinces of Tibet, Amdo and Kham, which are wealthy regions containing just over half the Tibetan nation, have by and large been subsumed in the provinces of Gansu, Qinghai, Szechuan and Yunnan. Here the Tibetan people form small minorities (no more than 19.36%, in the case of Qinghai; otherwise below 2% of the total provinces, 1982 Sample Survey of China Census Figures).

Since they came under Chinese administration in 1959, the central and western areas have been administratively separate. This central/western area alone is known as Tibet (or the Tibetan Autonomous Region) within the polity of China. Whereas the eastern areas have just over 2,000,000 Tibetans, this western/central residue named 'Tibet' is recorded as having a little under 2,000,000 inhabitants. Tibet is the only Minority Nationality Area recorded in which the minority is actually in the majority; they are the only Minority

Nationality with more nationals immediately outside of their nationality area than inside. Those who keep the records often have the power to write their own history, to make their own demographic fictions into self-fulfilling prophecies: China has done much here to slide the label Tibet onto the smaller western/central area, and to make a minority out of a nation.

Avedon, however, confuses rather than corrects the errors from these statistical manipulations. He gives a figure of some 2,000,000 Han Chinese and 1,800,000 Tibetans in the Tibetan Autonomous Region, that is the truncated Tibet which is the western/central area. This is a major error that may have lead him into further mistakes. According to Avedon's own figures there are only 250,000 people in the towns of Tibet, so where would the other 1,750,000 Han Chinese be? He has little alternative, perhaps, but to write that all medium-sized villages have an equal number of Han Chinese and Tibetans; one would have to suppose that most villages in Tibet had to be medium-sized to accommodate the numbers, though we are not told what this expression 'medium-sized village' means. He also argues that Han Chinese are displacing Tibetans from their villages, forcing the Tibetans to become nomads. In both of these two arguments he slips over from his figures on 'what the PRC itself labels Tibet,' that is the western/central area, to writing of Tibet in general, that is including Kham and Amdo in the east. This leaves it unclear as to quite which region he is writing about.

At least as far as the western/central (Tibetan Autonomous) region is concerned the figures Avedon cites are nonsense. Outside of Lhasa and Shigatse and the military garrisons, as nearly any traveller in 1986 or 1987 can confirm, one has to search for Han Chinese personnel even if one wants to find them. My observation is that such civil personnel were often not present below prefecture level, and that the county level representatives were usually Tibetan.[6] Otherwise most Han Chinese presence is limited to sporadic line-ministry offices, not to the management of daily governance at a grass-roots level. As Avedon notes elsewhere, by and large the Han Chinese do not enjoy life on the Tibetan plateau, and do not wish to settle there. The demographic truth of the non-Tibetan presence has to be closer to the official Chinese figures, which is around 106,000 (1982), or 76,000 (1984), that is 5% of Avedon's total.[7]

Dharamsala makes a claim similar to Avedon's in their figures in a broadsheet entitled 'Approximate Population Figures for Tibet, 1987.' This gives a total population of 3,870,000 for the Tibetan Autonomous Region, with 1,890,000 Tibetan nationals. This would leave a balance of 1, 980,000 and the broadsheet states that 1,720,000 are Chinese, which roughly tallies with the totals. These are not claimed as independent figures but come from Chinese sources, in particular from the 1982 census, which is the only published source of which I am aware that allows an ethnic or nationality breakdown. This census does give a total number of 3,870,000: but this is for Tibetan nationals in the Chinese polity as a whole, with

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[6]The shang, (or xiang) for which the normal gloss is township, is a peoples' organization, but it is not one in which the state administrative apparatus is directly represented. It is a "bottom-up" organization of local government that in Tibet is composed of six neighborhoods or village-communities, which elect the officers. It has little power at present, and the Chinese civil administrative presence is mainly focused at the 'county' (cheuh) or sub-county offices. The separation of such local government from administration or ministry activity is a the heart of the post-1978 Chinese reforms.

[7]This excludes military personnel for whom estimates by Tibetan nationals vary from 100,000 to 500,000 at different times. We do not know whether this definition of residence includes paramilitary personnel and temporary workers.

1,890,000, being the number of people resident in the Tibetan Autonomous Region, of whom 1,787,000 are Tibetan nationals.

This suggests that there has been a misreading. One way or another, it seems that the figure for the total number of Tibetans in the Chinese polity has been taken as the total population for all groups in the Tibetan Autonomous Region; this has been put alongside the commonly-read figure for the number of Tibetan nationals in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. The difference between the two generates nearly 2,000,000 extra Han Chinese, all imaginary, in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. This is quite enough to populate each and every village all over again with a ghostly Han doppelganger for every single Tibetan!

The real issue on migration and settlement by Han Chinese is not the Tibetan Autonomous Region but the eastern areas. However, it is not possible to clearly desegregate the statistics for those regions, beyond those stated for Qinghai. And here there are also some discrepancies between Avedon's data and that of the 1982 Sample Census. Whereas the latter gives the population of Qinghai (most of Amdo) as 3,895,000 Han and other Chinese to 754,200 Tibetans, Avedon gives 2,500,000 to 700,000 (year and source unspecified). The Chinese figures would actually be more telling to illustrate numerical dominance than those of Avedon himself; and if this really were a historical series there would be clear evidence of modern settlement.

In any case, whether the ration is 5.7 to 1, or 3.6 to 1, Tibetans are clearly outnumbered in Amdo. What does this imply? One simply cannot assume, as Avedon does, that all non-Tibetan peoples present here are Chinese migrants from after 1950. First, the ethnic picture in the convoluted mountain regions of south and east Kham (Yunnan and Szechuan) traditionally is every bit as complex as that in the Himalayan chain itself (where one has Tibetans at one altitude, 'tribals' at another, and Hindus below, on each and every mountain slope).[8] Second, both the Tibetan polity, and the Chinese polity, have had histories of cultural and political influence in these areas.[9] Third, the idea of clearly demarcated borders within which only one nationality resides and one polity exerts authority is a relatively modern idea. Spiritual and political authority were not always bounded in Cartesian space, nor was religious power always subservient to secular power in traditional Asiatic States. Accordingly, the question of whether or not these present-day borderlands really were a part of traditional Tibet or China may simply be inappropriate.

Similarly the presence of 'Chinese Muslims' in Tibet is not a modern phenomenon. This has been documented since the time of the Jesuit missionaries in the area, and unless Avedon is referring to something far more sinister than these restaurateurs of Lhasa, this is not evidence of a new wave of Chinese settlement in Central Tibet. Yet there has been Han immigration in modern times into the eastern areas, especially from central Szechuan; but we do not know the figure. Also, urban growth in the east (as in other areas), is quite disproportionately linked to Han Chinese settlement. Beyond the figures for Amdo, there is little firm quantitative data available.

In Avedon's account this settlement is presumed to be such that Tibetans have been made 'landless' in the process, and forced into 'nomadism'. Here his argument goes slightly awry, as the normal western senses and implications of these two terms are not appropriate in Tibet. In development terminology 'landlessness' is normally associated with rural poverty. This is especially so in areas of high population density, where the wealthy and

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[8]The writings of various travellers, from Rock onwards, and other sources such as the Journal of the West-China Border Research Society, give clear evidence of this.

[9]Jackson's excellent historical work Na-khi Religion, Mouton, 1979, illustrates the former.

privileged force subsistence farmers off the land and replace them with capital machinery for intensive crop production to maximize returns from sales in markets. Yet Tibet has a quite particular agricultural economy, in part based on nomadic pastoralism and in part on crops, but in both cases based on rights to land being held in common by extended household or kinship, and village or neighborhood, groups. Furthermore, the population densities in western and central Tibet are low by any standards, and possession of land for agricultural subsistence is not the issue. Access to new 'inputs,' especially fertilizer and the location of new irrigation works, would be more critical points to examine if one wishes to look at equality of distribution rather than landholding itself. Above the treeline in purely pastoral areas, this notion of private landownership becomes irrelevant. Here the western ideal or model of the small homestead on its own private range-land is quite inappropriate. Collective rights, common property, resource management are the norm. Furthermore, 'nomadism,' which in popular western thought stands for a more 'primitive' way of life than that of a farmer, in Tibet implies a pastoral way of life particularly valued by those who practice it. At the moment, many Tibetans would not prefer a sedentary way of life.

Moreover, there is an irony in the fact that these supposedly impoverished pastoral nomads, with their large herds of livestock, are one of the principal groups to benefit from China's introduction of a market economy. The declared value of the Gross Value of Agricultural Output per capita for some rural areas of Tibet, at 500 to 600 yuan per head, is well ahead of the overall Chinese average (276 yuan per head). My own work indicates that an average 'tent-holding' of livestock has a value well into five figures in yuan, which means one is rich by Chinese standards. This can be turned into cash as butter or beef on the open ('outside') market, as the pastoralists are now linked by road to the markets in Lhasa. The existence of such material wealth is also the general observation made by modern travellers (including Tibetans revisiting the area) on conditions in pastoral areas of Amdo. This opening up of Tibet to trade is a result of the general economic reforms in China introduced in 1978, and implemented in Tibet in 1980.

One comment Avedon makes is that recent economic changes have lead to a massive general inflation in the price of commodities. This is accurate. However Avedon, unlike an economist, does not interpret this as a predictable effect of the deregulation of the market in what prior to 1980 was still run as a centralized 'command' economy. Instead he sees it as another attack on Tibetans, now forced to pay more for basic commodities. But many Tibetans do not rely on open-markets such as those of Lhasa for their commodities, but still subsist mainly on local production backed by some access to regulated and subsidized state outlets for basic commodities (where the "inside" price is 50% of the "outside" or market price). Avedon does not describe how inflation has benefited the many Tibetans who now are producing for the market, such as the producers and dealers in wool, those who truck-in butter from Amdo or who sell meat in Lhasa, and the local itinerant peddlers. It is not only the Chinese producers of manufactured goods (which in relative and historical terms are luxuries rather than basic commodities), who have gained from the creation of open-markets.

In economic terms inflation is both cost and benefit; it is important to remember that it discriminates not, at least not directly, against Tibetans per se, but by economic criteria. It can work against people on the fringes of what was a subsistence economy who have to sell their labor to purchase essential commodities in a newly-formed market economy; it often works for those who produce agricultural surpluses for sale in the market. The state marketing in commodities was and is subsidized and the existence of open markets beyond direct central control has lead to a growth in production beyond the level required to fulfill the quotas of the state (though these in principle are now voluntary). In simple terms, much of the extra money from the rise in prices has gone to those who produce, and many of these are Tibetans. The state marketing policy of China has materially profited Tibetan

pastoralist; hence economic exchange between the nationalities in China is not just a question of one-sided exploitation.

There may (now) be rich Tibetans as well as poor Tibetans. Socio-economic polarization is perhaps predictable in these conditions, and is something about which the socialists (especially hardline Maoists) are quite critical. Whether, for example, the number of Tibetan destitute or poor in Amdo has increased or decreased since the instigation of economic markets and the reforms is a pertinent question; but it is not one that Avedon considers.

He does consider access to modern social services, especially to education and health care. He correctly points to the absence of health facilities outside of the few urban areas, where there are a high concentration of Chinese. He also suggests a nationality bias in treatment for Han Chinese beyond this. The absence of health facilities outside of urban areas and district headquarters is suggested both by direct observation, and by a careful reading of Chinese statistics. But then the provision of health services to nomads, given their transhumance and low population density, is difficult anywhere in the world, as much in the Sahel as in Tibet. The overall low population density raises conventional distribution costs of goods and services astronomically for rural areas, and the availability of these is almost by definition associated with urbanization. Such modern urban growth has been carried out by Chinese. One simple corollary is that because of where they live Han Chinese will have better access to hospital facilities. Furthermore, within these catchment areas the status, power, and connections of the Han Chinese may give them disproportionate access to scarce medical resources, but then so do these factors in most countries, except in a purely socialist world.

Beyond this urban Chinese localization of facilities, there is one other clear medical issue. Avedon alleges that there is routine infanticide of Tibetan babies. When I read these reports of Avedon's in Nepal in 1987, I put them to a Tibetan nurse who had then only recently arrived from Tibet. She was completely literate in Chinese, had been educated in Chamdo and Chengdu, and had worked in hospitals in Chamdo and Lhasa; but she had no love for China's presence in Tibet and eventually had left for India and Nepal. Her opinion was as follows. First, a pregnant single woman, Tibetan or Chinese, might be put under pressure to have an abortion. Second, couples in towns are encouraged to have only two children, beyond this number they would probably be put under pressure to have an abortion; it might also be the case that when born, if there was a compelling reason, a second or third child might be fostered elsewhere. This would be in-line with China's general demographic policy for 'single-child' families, the local implementation of which may not take account of the special legal exemptions that exist for minority peoples.

This nurse volunteered that any such cases would be extremely rare, and specifically ruled out the idea that Chinese hospitals were routinely killing-off Tibetan babies. I believe that she was taken aback by my question; while it is not impossible that she was naive or misinformed, I would be extremely surprised if she were that wrong. She displayed no reticence whatsoever in being critical of Chinese in Tibet, and I think she was in a prime position to comment on such matters with authority. Furthermore Avedon's logic, if we look at it more closely, contains certain contradictions. It is difficult to see how he can point to the absence of practically any general health facilities, and then at the same time claim that a program of racial infanticide and sterilization is being carried out at large on the Tibetan population. Moreover, it is quite clearly those Tibetans who work with the Chinese in towns who have access to medical facilities. This means it would be the supporters of the Chinese whose children were being killed. Discriminating against those who cooperate with one is not a credible way of ruling.

Many of the same points about distribution apply as much to education as well as to health. There are some special features, for instance, the primary language of instruction, Mandarin, must favor the Han nationality students. The medium of instruction is an almost

insoluble problem with an ethnic minority in a modernizing state, one which bears as much on cultural issues as on problems of equity and dominance. Perfection would exist only if higher education were available in the minority language; yet it would be difficult to justify using scarce linguistic talent to translate scientific texts into the 54 minority languages; and at a high level of study in China, like anywhere else in the world, a student has to look at works in languages other than that of his own country (notably English) if he wishes to keep abreast of scientific research.

The basic dilemma is as follows: either there will be a promotion of studies in Tibetan which, it is reasonable to suppose, will attract more Tibetans than Han Chinese; in this case the point can be made, as by Avedon, that they are being disproportionately excluded from higher modern knowledge which is only available in Chinese; or one does not have Tibetan studies, in which case the point could be made that the Chinese are not maintaining local cultural knowledge and traditions. The Chinese who released the data on the large number of Tibetans taking higher education in Tibetan Studies probably never thought that it could be used to show anything other than a liberal and enlightened policy of its administration in Tibet.

Religious practice is even more immediately concerned with Tibetan traditions and national culture than education. There are contradictions here too. Avedon states that the recent rebuilding of monasteries and temples is from local investment. Outside of the few towns this revival has little to do with the state; yet in the towns, in Shigatse and at other major centers, the work is far too massive to be paid for privately out of Tibet's fledgling market-economy. The recent Chinese record in such material matters is good indeed, and central subsidies cover much of the massive construction at Tashilunpo. The standard of execution of the masonry work is excellent, though the wood is unseasoned and the standard of artwork leaves a lot to be desired in comparison to that of Tibetan artists in Nepal. Avedon is undoubtedly right in stating that it is the Chinese intention to restore only major sites, and that tourism is the overt economic justification: so it is with the preservation of many monuments in London. At least they are rebuilding rather than knocking down, and though it is ultimately a material rather than a spiritual statement, this has surely been a step in the right direction.

Possibly the Chinese public at large, by virtue of this work, will one day realize, that the Tibetans really do or did have a civilization. Avedon is correct to draw attention to the Chinese antipathy towards organized religion, that is not under the direct control of the state, and the pressure against monastic recruitment. But then, the Catholic church has a similar problem with its community in China, and it is not clear to what degree the present Chinese attitude is just anti-religious, or anti-tradition, or contains specifically anti-Tibetan components.

Whether general or particular to Tibet, the contradiction between materialism and religion is a key issue. For many in the West, the central significance of Tibet is not that its people should have access to industrial goods and services, but something quite different. Tibet stands as a symbol of a pre-industrial and spiritual life, a culture centered on Buddhism. It is the Chinese attitude to this, rather than the issues of equity and development that are at the center of this protest and their idea of Tibet. Yet the cant of 'superstition' is not merely the call of present-day China to Tibetan civilization, but that of the modern to the medieval world-view. Avedon does not place China's action and attitudes within the general context of a modern materialism, which is almost always antithetical to spiritual values, but that of differences of nationality, people, and material expropriation. For example, while he deals with the history of removal of statues from Tibet to China during the cultural revolution, he does not deal with the alleged reports of the role of Tibetans in some of the destruction at that time, which might suggest that China's oppression of Tibet is not solely a matter of anti-Tibetan policies. The Sino-Tibetan

conflict, which correlates with this division, masks these contradictions behind the issue of independence and nationalism.

Hence, beyond his factual errors, Avedon makes further mistakes in analysis. He does not distinguish nationality biases in policy from other current factors, such as the urban/rural divide, population density, and wealth; nor does he take account of the way that the cumulative history of interaction of these factors may be responsible for the pattern of present-day inequities. In the broad sweep of life these criticisms may appear to be technicalities: after all these points are to a degree correlated, and may to some degree be constitutive of the other. But this criticism is more than a scholarly nit-picking: it is only by disentangling these factors from the statistics that we can see if there is a particular current nationality policy bias, distinct from other factors which are the result of earlier processes and patterns, that is from events preceding 1980. With the best will in the world the effects of these past decisions and processes cannot be changed overnight. This is especially true in sectors with as much lead time as education, and in areas where the topographical uniqueness of Tibet itself forms a constraint.

To simplify the picture for the western/central area, the Chinese are in the towns where there are services; the Tibetans are in the countryside where there are few services. It would only be by changing the demographic facts in the few towns, that is by moving Chinese out and Tibetans in, that the effects of past policies could be fully reversed, and this is not possible overnight. Even if one could do so immediately, this might work against the growth of modern technical and administrative services for economic development., Ironically, pursuing such a path would be an act similar to the 'leftist' policies of China during the cultural revolution, which placed the correct class background of people in power, that is the 'relations of production,' above the ability of those people to carry out the technical work, only this time this "reverse discrimination" would be revamped in terms of nationalities rather than class structures.

If the provision of modern economic goods and services to Tibetans at large is the issue, than one has to consider the 'efficiency' or 'rightist' argument. This is that the short-to-medium term needs are for greater numbers of outsiders with special skills for organization, teaching and general development; not the immediate repatriation of those who have this experience. Moreover, it would be the conventional logic of any development service, be this aid offered by westerners in a third-world country or that by the Chinese in Tibet, that one can only attract personnel with specialist skills if they and their families can be offered living conditions that compare with those that they would receive at home. This implies the continuation of a rural/urban bias correlated to the Tibetan/Han nationality distinction, at least in the short-term, if one wants to modernize. That is unless the entire Western-educated Tibetan diaspora returns home.

Tourism, which Avedon clearly sees as a mixed benefit, is directly pertinent here. The point is that modern goods and facilities cannot be available everywhere immediately, but have to be organized and supplied. There is a clear contradiction in having foreigners (in this context very much fellow-travellers of the Han Chinese having highly privileged access to these scarce goods) complain that Tibetans are excluded.

A similar situation exists in other Asian countries where there are many foreign tourists and experts, not to mention the southeast Asian countries which have known a Western colonial presence or recent military protection. It is simple to pass a moral judgement on the Han Chinese measured against some absolute ideal. This is unfair, given the direction of policy changes since 1980; it is also short-sighted. One has also to ask in what ways does the situation of the visiting Westerners, in terms of their privileged access to resources and services, differ to that of the Chinese, other Asian elites, or their colonial precursors. Does ethnicity, insensitive colonial-style behavior, a past history of oppression, or the suspected permanent nature of the presence, make a basic difference or not? And if these material changes are now inevitable, then one has to ask in what ways now are the

Chinese better or worse than any other power that is introducing the rather mixed benefits of the industrial revolution to a traditional Asian state?

Overall, Avedon's account is only accurate on the historical facts of oppression from China to Tibet since 1950 up to the present decade. Many of those events and processes have a carryover into the present period. But his work does not allow us to see in what ways and how much the situation has been changing as a result of the implementation of the 1978 and 1980 reforms. Instead there are some major statistical errors, a slippage of logic into propaganda, the avoidance of some basic parallels, wider contradictions, and a carryover of the same oppressive metaphors.

It is clear that there have been recent improvements, at least by Western material economic standards. Since the liberal reforms which promote economic growth started to take hold, Tibetans have had access to the 50,000 km of road that have run across (greater) Tibet for reasons of rule for some time now. They can use buses, and even own trucks; those from the west and center can visit Lhasa for trade at least once a year. There is geographic mobility, and a growing market economy, both in local items and in modern commodities that either are Chinese, or that come via China.

From 1983 up until 1987 it appears that regional autonomy, and access to material goods and some services, was improving as a direct result of policy reforms. From research in the summer of 1986, while these qualitative trends were clear, it was not possible to say whether such changes had effected 30% or 80% of the population in these western/central areas (Clarke, 1987, loc.cit.). Lhasa and its environs may well have been atypical. Yet post-1980 one has to allow that some parts of the Chinese administration were trying, in some limited ways at least, for some part of the time, to materially help the cause of Tibetans.

## Policy

To value the separate civilization of Tibet and Tibetan autonomy, and at the same time to hold that modern material goods and services are absent in Tibet because they are deliberately withheld by the Chinese, is an all too convenient belief. It hides a more basic contradiction between materialism and spirituality, one which cannot be fully encompassed within nationality issues.

In the political alliance of progressive and traditional camps in the West against oppression in Tibet, it has been forgotten that these two normally make rather uneasy bedfellows. Furthermore, the actions of indigenous people who choose to embrace materialism may not be too different from those of equally materialistic colonizers. Whatever their route of entry, by indigenous elites or external colonists, individualism and material consumerism rarely support a traditional civilization. Even Tibetan autonomy might not be any guarantee of the maintenance of Tibetan civilization.

We may have to realize that whatever the future of Tibet, traditional Tibetan culture may soon exist not so much in a lived society as in the marginal lands of the Himalaya, and the records collected by people such as those who contribute to this Bulletin. Whether the political future of Tibet is an issue for The Himalayan Research Bulletin is a difficult question, and I have suggested that the answer is yes, but is so then only by our own professional standards of accuracy and analysis.

Up until this decade modern Tibet was very much a closed book. Now, after the reforms of 1978 and 1980, there are some changes, both internally in Tibet and by which outsiders can see what is happening. One of the contradictions of the present liberalization is that for the first time it places the media in a position to communicate scenes of oppression. This it does irrespective of its overall significance or even the fact that its very possibility belies an improvement. The persistence of and dominance of the idea of oppression in this decade, which the media itself helps to maintain, is only a part truth, as

life is now materially easier for Tibetans in Tibet. This idea also serves, to a point, as a psychological convenience. Factions and differences can be ignored, as the common cause unites Tibetans in opposition to China, onto whom all the material evils of the twentieth century may be projected and, hopefully, cast-out, like a scapegoat.

An independent Tibet is the hope and slogan of Tibetan nationalists. Yet a political scientist or modern historian could not fail to point out that the independent nation-state, whatever its symbolic significance, is not a reality in the latter part of the twentieth century. Superpowers change the picture. For example, Poland and Czechoslovakia are independent of Russia, and Panama and Mexico are independent of the USA. To what extent can such nominal independence be a core issue, given a world of political 'satellites,' 'spheres of interest,' and global economic integration. To use the slogan of independence for political leverage is one thing; to envisage it as a feasible future is quite another. Before stating that Tibetans do not need any help, and that China should just leave Tibet alone, one would do as well to be pragmatic. The four to five million Tibetans have nearly one thousand million Han Chinese neighbors, to whom in the modern, even more than in the preindustrial world, they inescapably will have economic and political linkages. To assume that Tibet could revert to its pre-1950 theocratic form, and then swallow industrial modernization whole without disruption, is naive and in the extreme.

The possibilities for constructive economic and social change are not clear, given an area with such cultural, demographic and topographical peculiarities as Tibet. It would be fascinating to speculate on how the local cultural and ecological parameters of Tibet could forge some new turning of the wheel, some new dialectical inversion, for a post-industrial society. This may be a romanticism, moreover, one to which Western Tibetophiles and anthropologists may be particularly susceptible: but it is not quite as naive as the wish to recreate the past.

Yet whatever modernizing dialectic has to be worked out, it must take account of two factors. First, the geopolitics of economic relations mean that this dialectic must involve China as well as Tibet. Secondly, for it to work equitably it must involve all Tibetan groups; indeed, for it to work properly, Tibet needs the return of Tibetan nationals in the West, who are the one group with the technical and managerial knowledge, the commitment and the vision, capable of forging a new and modern Tibet that still has a chance of remaining in essence Tibetan.