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# CONNECTED

ENGAGEMENTS WITH MEDIA

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## COMPUTING FOR TIBET: VIRTUAL POLITICS IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

### **Excerpt from Tibetan Bulletin November-December 1993**

Tibetan Bulletin, the official journal of the Tibetan government-in-exile, known as the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), is published by the Department of Information and International Relations, Dharamsala, India. World Tibet Network News reprints each issue on-line.)

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#### 4.1 Dharamsala goes E-mailing

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Bhuchung K. Tsering

After several years of feasibility study, the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala is finally on e-mail. The idea of putting Dharamsala on the electronic mail map of the world was conceived in 1989 when a New York-based computer consultant, Ms. Indra Singh, suggested the setting up of TibetNet. Ms. Singh felt TibetNet would provide the Tibetans the technological ability to disseminate the Tibetan story worldwide. She made preliminary trials in collaboration with the Department of Information and International Relations (DIIR). The then DIIR Kalon Lodi G. Gyari shared Ms. Singh's feelings saying "TibetNet is the vehicle which will take Tibetans to the twenty-first century."

Despite the unreliable telephone system, an ad-hoc connection was made in early 1990. As a simple message, Hello from Dharamsala made its first journey from a laptop computer to the computer in the Office of Tibet New York, there was jubilation. Reporting on the event, this journal, in its March-April 1990 issue, said it was the first tottering steps the Tibetans, cooped as they are in their own little Shangri-la, are taking to catch up with what has bypassed them—telecommunications.

Since then much water has flowed down the Bhagsunath rivulet in Dharamsala. Some problems made the experiment remain as it was; just an experiment. But the Tibetans were given a taste of what was in store for us. Just as the shrewd business

sense of a Tibetan does not let an opportunity pass by, this idea of a private electronic mail service became merely placed on the backburner, not totally forgotten.

Meanwhile, Dharamsala's Planning Council had set up the Tibetan Computer Resource Center to provide an organized computerised service to the Tibetan community. Simultaneously, in Canada, the Canada Tibet Committee had taken the initiative to enter Tibet into the e-mail world actively. The offices of Tibet in New York and London followed suits [sic]. They all had the experience of Tibet Information Network in London which had over the years become one of the few independent sources for objective news from Tibet. Dharamsala began to feel the pressure to set up a nodal point here . . .

Dharamsala is going e-mail. A small step for mankind, but a giant step for the Tibetans.

Much has been written in recent years about the explosion of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in the United States and elsewhere. Today, anyone with access to a computer, modem, and network account can be linked into the vast web of global electronic information flows known colloquially as cyberspace. The growth of new communication technologies has gone hand in hand with the proliferation of international and transnational movements and organizations, what Arjun Appadurai calls "complex postnational social formations" (1993:420),<sup>1</sup> and the emergence of a global civil society.<sup>2</sup> American discourse on computer networks, however, has been characteristically parochial, dominated by arguments over universal accessibility to the still-protean "information superhighway" and its potential commercialization.<sup>3</sup> Little attention has been paid to the relationship between CMC and these transnational social forms.<sup>4</sup> This piece offers a concrete example of how computer networks have been used by members of one such formation.

Since 1989, Tibetans and Tibet supporters around the world have used networked computers to communicate among themselves, mobilize grass-roots opinion, and inform the media about events in Tibet and the diaspora. This activity represents an increasingly common phenomenon in the post-cold war era whereby marginalized, diasporic, and dissident groups embrace new media technologies in order to assert their political presence in the international arena.<sup>5</sup> What makes electronic networks particularly significant for such activism is that they enable a form of intercultural solidarity that does not rest on face-to-face contact. Thus Tibetans and their supporters in New York, London, Geneva, Tokyo, Canberra, Toronto, New Delhi, and Dharamsala can all be connected and participate simultaneously in the Tibet struggle.

The interviews in this essay with Robbie Barnett, founder of Tibet Information Network, and Tseten Samdup, information and press officer, Office of Tibet, London, trace the emergence this "virtual community."<sup>6</sup> They are part of a larger study of the collaboration between westerners and Tibetans in

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The spread of new media forms and the tremendous growth of transnational and international movements and organizations has coincided with the breakdown of traditional cold war alliances and enmities. For interstitial groups such as the Tibetans, this confluence of events has meant the opportunity to create a new political space for themselves in the contemporary world order. By allying themselves with various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and taking advantage of sophisticated information technologies, for instance, Tibetans have been able to raise the Tibet issue in a number of important international fora with greater visibility than ever before.<sup>8</sup>

The Tibetan delegation's experience at the UN World Conference of Human Rights in Vienna (1993) is a case in point. Before the official UN conference opened, Chinese protests over a scheduled address by the Dalai Lama at the parallel NGO conference caused UN organizers to ban the exiled leader from speaking. The controversial decision attracted intense publicity, a large part of which was generated by online dispatches and faxes from Tibetans in Vienna to supporters, NGOs, governments, and members of the press around the world. By utilizing the on-site communications center set up by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC),<sup>9</sup> representatives of the Dalai Lama, including Tseten Samdup, interviewed below, learned firsthand the benefits of computer-mediated communication. Under mounting public pressure, conference officials eventually reversed their decision and allowed the Dalai Lama to address the NGO forum.

What are we to make of this form of disembodied communication and the virtual politics it facilitates? What sort of intercultural negotiations take place in the process of working across cultural difference and what are the limits of the solidarities engendered? The interviews in this piece attempt to answer these questions and to shed light on the increasingly mediated nature of political action in the late twentieth century. They touch on issues such as the ambiguities of an electronic forum for political discourse; the growing interdependence of decentralized communication technologies and the mass media; and the culturally complex character of transnational social/political movements which bring together "first world" and "third world" peoples. To fully understand the recent trajectory of the Tibet struggle, however, it is necessary briefly to examine the history of Tibetan/Western relations in the diaspora.

#### **Tibetans and Westerners<sup>10</sup>**

Tibetans have a history of deep involvement with non-Tibetan "friends"<sup>11</sup> dating back to 1959, when the Dalai Lama, fleeing Chinese occupiers, escaped Tibet, creating an exodus of Tibetans who followed their leader across the

Himalayas with only what they could carry on their backs. Nehru's government, international relief agencies, and sympathetic westerners hurried to aid the tens of thousands of refugees who streamed into Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal, and India, all in desperate need of shelter, food, and medical care. Over the next several years, scattered in settlements across the Indian subcontinent, Tibetans set about rebuilding their lives with help from the Indians and foreign aid organizations.<sup>12</sup>

One of the Tibetans' top priorities in exile was to preserve their unique religious traditions, a decision which reflected the centrality of Buddhism in Tibetan life. With the Dalai Lama's newly formed government in exile overwhelmed by refugee rehabilitation and educational responsibilities, the monasteries in exile were forced to rely on a network of Western relief workers, travelers, and other sympathetic individuals for donations. Over time, as high *lamas*, or teachers, went abroad and established centers in the West to teach Tibetan religion, meditation, and language, a network of Western practitioners (what I call a transnational *sangha*) evolved which also supported the fledgling Buddhist institutions in exile. This cultivation of outside "patrons," or *sbyin-bdags*, is part of the cultural framework of *mchod-yon*, whereby spiritual guidance is exchanged for material and political support, and which characterized interactions at all levels of society in old Tibet, from the perception of the Tibetan state vis-à-vis the outside world to the relationship between an individual and his or her *lama*.<sup>13</sup>

Over the years, Tibetans have had no difficulty reinterpreting this social relation in exile because, unlike other refugee groups, they have encountered many benefactors eager to offer support in exchange for contact with them.<sup>14</sup> These potential *sbyin-bdags* often hold romantic fantasies about Tibet which derive from a long history of Western representation of Tibet as Shangri-la and the belief that all Tibetans, regardless of their spiritual training or accomplishments, embody spiritual values that have been lost in the West.<sup>15</sup> However problematic, this first-world fantasy may account for the long-standing commitment many Western donors have made to helping Tibetans remain Tibetan in exile, which in turn has enabled Tibetans not only to survive the trauma of displacement but to keep their refugee status. Retaining this status, as opposed to taking Indian or Nepali citizenship, is seen as an act of patriotism by members of the exile community, allowing them to fulfill the Dalai Lama's vision that "the purpose of refugee life is to rescue the nation, the people, and the cultural traditions of Tibet."<sup>16</sup> Western largesse, however, has been a double-edged sword. While it has played a crucial role in helping Tibetans preserve their cultural identity in diaspora, it has functioned as a conservative force in exile society by privileging religious institutions over secular ones. In so doing, it has hampered Tibetan efforts to overcome their stereotyped image and have their political claims taken seriously by the world community.<sup>17</sup> At the same

time, Tibetans have had to see a sacred place as a place of support.<sup>18</sup>

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time, Tibetans have made productive use of Western fantasies about Tibet as a sacred place and Tibetans as special beings in their efforts to generate support.<sup>18</sup>

It has only been recently, however, that Tibetans have put their unusual alliance with Westerners to work for the purpose of building an international movement. This change of focus was initiated by events which took place in September 1987, when major pro-independence demonstrations erupted in Lhasa, Tibet. China's violent response galvanized both the exile community and the latent network of Westerners who had always supported the refugees but who had never actively campaigned for Tibet. They joined together in publicizing the riots and in so doing attracted new recruits to the cause. Tibet support groups quickly sprang up in Switzerland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, England, Australia, and North America, many filled with young professionals who had no previous ties to the Tibet issue but who shared concerns about human rights, the environment, and other global issues. Since then, a definable Tibet Movement has emerged which, while still relying on Gandhian tactics such as demonstrations and boycotts, has also developed new strategies that are reflective of changing contemporary realities, namely, the deployment of traditional Tibetan "culture" in novel arenas and the use of computer-mediated technologies.

#### The Computer/Media/Information Nexus

Over the last several years I have been tracking the proliferation of Tibet-related computer conferences and newsletters, including CanTibNet (CTN)—now called World Tibet Network News (WTN), Tibet Information Network (TIN), Tibet News Digest (TND)—now part of (WTN), and talk.politics.tibet.<sup>19</sup> WTN, founded in 1991 by the Canada Tibet Committee, features daily news reports from wire services and from Tibet organizations such as the Tibet Information Network. It also posts press releases, "urgent action alerts," and other information from government and nongovernmental organizations such as the Central Tibetan Administration and its overseas offices and various Tibet support groups. WTN has also played an important role in the planning and launching of campaigns in support of Tibet, facilitating information exchange and coordination of activists dispersed around the globe. For example, WTN was involved with the campaign to free Gendun Rinchen, a tour guide arrested for reporting human rights violations in Tibet in 1993. It was also part of the effort to mobilize opposition to Beijing's Olympic bid, and to the renewal of Most Favored Nation trading status by U.S. President Clinton. Tibet-related postings have multiple (multimedia) lives: for instance, a story originating on TIN will be carried by WTN, broadcast on the BBC World Service and into Tibet by the Voice of America, and published by the *New York Times*. It will

then be reproduced in Tibet organization newsletters and exile community publications. While this redundancy can at times create a circular effect, it is indicative of the increasingly complex global media environment in which political action takes place, an environment characterized by transnational information flows and technological innovation.

In my conversations with Barnett and Samdup, both pointed out the need to find fresh audiences for their material in order to avoid the common pitfall of preaching to the converted. As Barnett put it, "the value of Tibet news is that it is read by people who have nothing to do with it." Barnett and Samdup work hard to disseminate their material to the mass media, which they see as the most important outlet. Although Tibetans have many friends in the press, as one American media consultant recently put it, historically they have not been successful in getting the kind of hard political coverage they desired. There are numerous possible explanations for why this is so, including the mass media's tendency to filter out dissenting opinions in favor of the status quo; the Tibetans' refusal to "package" the Dalai Lama for media consumption; general Western ignorance about Tibet; or a stereotyped view of Tibet as somehow not of this world and of Tibet supporters as flaky or strange.<sup>20</sup> With the growth of computer-mediated communication such as fax and e-mail, however, news gathering methods have changed, opening the door a crack for marginalized groups like the Tibetans to inject alternative viewpoints into the public arena. In this piece, Samdup describes how he uses a fax/modem to "plant stories" in the media by faxing press releases and background information to Western wire services in Beijing. If China watchers in Beijing find the story to be newsworthy, they put it out on the wires where it can be picked up by radio, print, or electronic news organizations around the world, making Tibet "news" and Samdup its "source."

As one of a only a handful of Tibetan journalists trained in the West, Samdup is uniquely positioned to understand both Western news-gathering practices and Tibetan approaches to information. Born in exile, Samdup worked for the government in exile in the Department of Information and International Relations where his responsibilities included assisting Western television crews that traveled to the former British hill station of Dharamsala to film the Dalai Lama and record refugee life. He then won a Ford Foundation Fellowship to study at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism in New York City. Upon graduating in 1991, Samdup moved to London to work for the Office of Tibet as information and press officer. In this role, Samdup mediates between two different cultural worlds, each with its own attitude toward information and what constitutes knowledge.

In old Tibet, a place where religion and government were traditionally intertwined and the head of state was considered to be an emanation of the Buddha Avalokitesvara, the most prized knowledge was spiritual in nature and the most

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respected individuals were *tulkus*, constantly reincarnating personages who had attained enlightenment but who voluntarily choose rebirth in order to assist other sentient beings. There was no civil society in the Western sense, because Tibet was not a democracy; there was no concept of the public's right to know or equal access to information. In the refugee community, information still has a different currency than it does in the West. Like many other non-Western societies that operate in what Eric Michaels (1985) calls an "economy of oral information," Tibetan hierarchies are based on differential access to information. As Samdup's comments illustrate, these hierarchies of power endure in exile and distinguish the ways Tibetans understand media. This deeply engrained orientation poses a problem for those reformers—including the Dalai Lama—who want to make Tibetan refugee society more open and democratic. Without the free flow of ideas and information, they argue, the public can not make educated decisions about the things they are supposed to decide upon, such as the government in exile's negotiating position vis-à-vis the Chinese. As a recent editorial in the *Tibetan Review* argues, "one of the peculiarities of our version of democracy seems to be that as far as the people are concerned, the less they know the better. When the people are kept in perpetual darkness, the government can do what it likes and call the system 'democracy'—or whatever happens to be the in thing at that time" (1994: 3). As this internal critique suggests, even with the best of intentions, old habits die hard.

There are other differences between the way Tibetans and westerners approach information. Unsurprisingly, Tibetans view any story that comes out of Tibet as news. For instance, according to Tseten Samdup, the government in exile often fails to apply "Western notions of facticity" to stories coming out of Tibet; instead, he says, "it looks at any story that is happening in Tibet as important. If something is happening, that's news. But journalists would say, 'Okay, how many people were there, what time did it happen, why did it happen.'" Yet to confirm a story is difficult given China's strict control over information in Tibet. In addition, Dharamsala often has to rely on testimony from escapees, many from rural areas who are not media savvy and who sometimes "don't tell the entire story because they think, what good would it do?" or who "exaggerate their stories," perhaps knowing that the more harrowing their tale, the greater the chance they will have an audience with the Dalai Lama, who uses meetings with new arrivals to keep abreast of developments in Tibet.

Despite claims to objectivity and facticity, Western media has its own set of culturally embedded social practices that shape and are shaped by sources, journalists and audiences who coexist in a complex interrelationship.<sup>21</sup> Structurally, the imperatives of commercial mass media demand a continuous flow of information which is packaged in specific ways for mainstream consumption. At times, Barnett suggests, journalistic needs have been dangerous for some Tibetans: "the history of journalism in Tibet is the history of Tibetans

being put at risk by freelance journalists for a story." Offering a thumbnail sociology of journalism, Barnett contrasts journalists who oversimplify, making "Tibetans look like victims," with the elite group of China watchers at the BBC World Service or the wire services, whose work reflects more of an interest in long-term processes in Tibet. Barnett sees his own work with Tibet Information Network as a corrective to the trend of representing Tibetans as victims; for him, Tibetans are active agents of their own history and TIN's purpose is to document this fact.

### Witnessing for Tibet

Within the text I have interspersed postings from Tibet Information Network, World Tibet Network News, and other Tibet-related conferences in order to give readers a feel for the heterogeneous nature of computer-mediated communication and to alert them to what is at stake in the Tibet struggle. Despite the media attention Tibetans have managed to attract in recent years, it has not translated into political gains in the international arena. After more than three decades, the Dalai Lama's government in exile is still not officially recognized by any country, and Tibetans are persona non grata at the United Nations, never having been granted observer status. Meanwhile, the situation worsens for dissidents in Tibet: the number of political prisoners jumped significantly in recent years as the Chinese severely cracked down on all forms of resistance to their rule (Asia Watch 1994). Postings like the following one function as sober reminders of this reality:

From: IN%tin@gn.apc.org "Robbie Barnett" 24-May-1993 10:28:31:40  
 To: IN%tin-List@UTORGPU.bitnet"  
 Subj: MAJOR UNREST IN LHASA, TIBET

#### URGENT URGENT URGENT

There has been a major outbreak of unrest in Lhasa today Monday 24th May involving 2-3,000 Tibetans stoning a police station and shops owned by Chinese migrants, according to foreigners contacted within the capital.

Chinese are said to have been restrained at first but have since used large amounts of tear gas. There are vague and unconfirmed reports of gunfire. There is an unconfirmed report of one person killed . . .

This is by far the most serious outbreak of unrest in Tibet for the last four years. Martial law, lifted only after 13 months, was declared on March 7th, 1989 after a series of very similar incidents. There have been over 150 known demonstrations in Tibet since the re-emergence of mass protests in the Himalayan region in September 1987. Al-

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In the period 1987-89 approximately 3,000 Tibetans were imprisoned for political activities and at least 200 killed by security forces during major demonstrations. Since 1990 there have been more protests, but involving only small numbers of Tibetans. However, political arrests from those small incidents doubled in 1992 from the previous year.

The first conversation in this piece is with Robbie Barnett, the founder of Tibet Information Network (TIN), an independent nonprofit organization that collects, analyzes, and distributes information about the current situation in Tibet. One of the Westerners radicalized by his experience in Tibet in 1987, Barnett began receiving information from Tibetans in Tibet through secret means upon his return to London. A Cambridge-educated journalist and actor, he felt a "moral responsibility" to disseminate this material to the outside world. Barnett's story of the birth of TIN reveals a fierce commitment to the standards of journalistic objectivity and intellectual independence. It also suggests the transformative effects of his experience in Tibet, a theme common to the personal narratives I collected from activists during the course of my fieldwork.

Barnett traces the evolution of TIN to Tibetan initiatives and events:

I walked into a square, a lot of people got shot in front of me, I got very frightened and thought the best thing to do is to watch, to be a witness, which a lot of us Westerners did at the time. . . . other Westerners wanted to get involved, to deter shooting by standing in the middle. I'm one of the ones who wanted to organize witnesses and set up chains of people transferring film canisters. We tried to tell those taking photographs that you mustn't be left with a canister . . . in my case, it's a way of dealing with fear—to get bossy [*laughs*].

Barnett's witnessing took the form of reporting what he and others had seen, verifying rumors, and recording the names of Tibetan prisoners. The shift from what Barnett calls the "Western witness experience"—tourists sitting around recounting what they saw—to relying on Tibetans as a source of knowledge was an important moment in TIN's evolution. It entailed close collaboration with a few Tibetans, each of whom risked his or her life by passing information to foreigners. From the beginning, Barnett attempted to apply Western journalistic standards of "facticity" to the material being passed, some of which failed to distinguish between information and commentary and was written in a rhetorical polemical style according to Tibetan tradition:

I was in a room in Lhasa and somebody brought in something that said, "Fifty babies had their hearts eaten out by Chinese for human sacrifice and then were thrown in the river." And I said, "This doesn't

wash." [Laughs.] Okay, so maybe it's true, but what are the numbers and when and how do you know and who saw it and how many? . . . I told them you can send as much comment as you like but it has to be kept separate from information. TIN is strongly committed to this idea of the fact.

Embedded in Barnett's belief that high quality of information is "the only thing we can offer the Tibetans" is a critique of the neo-orientalist tendency of those well-intentioned westerners who would see themselves as heroes, putting themselves between Chinese bullets and Tibetan bodies. Or, more likely, those who would see themselves as "saving Tibet." Barnett's narrative is thus complex and contradictory, moving between a strong commitment to his sources and an insistent detachment from Western-based supporters who make use of the information he publishes in their activism.

Barnett's work with TIN represents an ongoing extension of witnessing by Tibetans inside Tibet. He sees himself as a translator, facilitator, and communicator of information for a media that likes to listen to Western people "who patently know less about the situation than Tibetans," a phenomenon he labels as "deeply racist." At the same time, Barnett asserts that material coming from Dharamsala, which is translated into Indian English, can sometimes seem "florid" and "Victorian" to Western ears: "It never sounds believable, the semiotics of it are that it communicates fabrication. It is the English bequest to India, but it is a clerical language which is immobilizing." Although Barnett does not identify himself as an activist, his organization has nonetheless made a significant contribution to the struggle. TIN reports are currently distributed around the globe to more than a hundred paying subscribers who receive fax and e-mail versions. Another hundred receive TIN reports free, many of them via e-mail. TIN subscribers include members of the media, print, radio, and wire services in Asia, Europe, and North America, governments, human rights organizations, Tibet-related groups, and interested individuals. The organization survives on subscriptions and donations from foundations, individuals, and organizations such as the European Community.

**INTERNET ADDRESS:**

Tibet Information Network <tin@gn.apc.org>

**DATE OF CREATION:**

October 1987

**COMMENTS:**

The Tibet Information Network (TIN) is an independent non-profit making organisation which collects and analyses information about the situation in Tibet. It works to help protect fundamental human rights in Tibet by fostering the flow of information from Tibet about current conditions in that country.

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The organisation began when a group of Western tourists witnessed the shooting by Chinese police of a number of Tibetan demonstrators in Lhasa in October, 1987. The authorities denied that police had opened fire, expelled journalists and tourists, shut down telephone lines and impounded foreigners' photographs of the incident.

As a result, a number of tourists came together to compile detailed accounts of what they had seen and to send these to the outside world. Later some of those who had witnessed similar incidents formed TIN in order to continue the collection of accurate and dispassionate information about the situation inside Tibet.

TIN, now based in London, UK, continues to conduct research into conditions in Tibet. TIN makes documents available on the APC computer network (including PeaceNet, GreenNet, GeoNet, Nicarao, Pegasus, Web and IGC) and has a special mail service for usenet/bitnet users. Relevant materials are distributed to subscribing organisations throughout the world including human rights organisations, international agencies, governments, parliamentarians, and the media.

The collection and distribution of the information is guided by several fundamental principles. TIN aims to provide accurate and objective information, and to be free from political bias or affiliation. It therefore maintains its independence from any other organisations as well as from governments. TIN supplies information and research materials to its subscribers irrespective of their opinions and takes no part in campaigning or lobbying activities. (Excerpt from TERG)

The following conversation with Robbie Barnett took place on 18 August 1993 in the TIN office in London.

MCLAGAN: When you got on GreenNet and started your TIN conference, who did you envision you were addressing?

BARNETT: I don't really think like that. Because at that stage and even now, I'm still not sure who reads GreenNet.

MCLAGAN: That's what I was going to ask you.

BARNETT: It's a passive, imaginative process, you're addressing an imaginary audience, you're not trying to reach anyone. Anyway, TIN is just creating a historical monument to the statements of these people in Tibet. I wanted to build a monument, like the monument in the middle of the square in Lhasa commemorating the eighth-century Tibetan conquest of western China. I come from a monumental tradition of historians who dig up those things. I'm just marking down in stone what these Tibetans say has happened for people who want to know.

MCLAGAN: Some people would say, though, that you're using a most

ephemeral medium, you're not using stone. I mean that's an interesting metaphor you choose because it's about the least permanent medium.

BARNETT: Well, no, these conferences stay there. The conference is probably still there from when I started it. I mean, all those postings on GreenNet, you could tap into now and read. But I didn't know about the life of these conferences. I didn't know what actual mental user activity there is; I never knew. I'm not sure anybody read them. But the network people liked them. They saw this as being somehow useful because all the things that were going on turned out to be human rights emergencies. So they felt this was a two-way process and as somehow vindicating their existence because here's this guy putting on stuff which is saying that people urgently need help. Whether anybody read it at that stage, I have no idea.

MCLAGAN: But at the same time you were putting out hard copy versions.

BARNETT: Yeah, the printed reports were a priority. The conference material was just my personal desire to see something placed somewhere as a monument. So that people who were in that world could read it.

MCLAGAN: You weren't thinking that this technology would be something you could use to connect to the Office of Tibet in New York or to different Tibet support groups in Europe?

BARNETT: No. Nobody seemed to have anything to do with GreenNet in the Tibet world at that time. That came much later. That's not really right. I specifically wasn't interested in connecting to the community of Tibet martyrs and fellow sufferers [*laughs*] and the emotional pathological there-but-for-the-grace-of-god-go-I people. I'm not interested in communicating. I mean that seemed to me to be the problem with Tibet was that it only communicated to the other fellow, empathetic martyrs. I remember the reason that I wanted stuff on GreenNet was because I wanted Tibet information to be read by someone who has nothing to do with the church of Tibet martyrs and would-be empathetic martyrs. I wouldn't have given a damn if the Tibet community office somewhere had been on e-mail. I wasn't interested in that. I think the value of Tibet news is that it is read by people who have nothing to do with it. The lack of value of Tibet news is that it is only read by people who are already committed and predisposed to the issue. That's an inverse achievement, it is not a communication to have them reading it. That's why I put it online—it was outside the locked circuit of Tibet supporters.

MCLAGAN: When we first met in 1990, you talked about some problems you were having with the TIN conference on GreenNet. Can you talk about that a bit?

BARNETT: Yes. Electronic communications has this tendency, once it is open ended, to appeal to the lowest common denominator. This is the unsavory side to the electronic world. It was very hard to get GreenNet, PeaceNet, and all the connected organizations to actually operate consistent with the

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policy that TIN was a moderated conference. There was an incident in 1990 when I deleted some material from the conference that someone had crashed into which was about forced abortion in Tibet and which I said was unsubstantiated and emotive. I put a notice in saying that I had deleted the material and one of network's sysops said, "How dare you do this, this is censorship." So I wrote a response, which he later accepted.

It's very interesting, this emotionality of the liberal conscience which one has to distinguish from the liberal intelligence. There is the idea that if everybody could say anything they like, somehow it's better. But we often end up with exaggerated, highly inflammatory anti-Chinese racist commentary. This is a huge problem within network culture. It is open to the most inflammatory material—to emotional fascism. TIN doesn't deal in that area at all. I'm not interested in it; I just use electronics as a way of putting out stuff that has our name on it.

MCLAGAN: Do you read the other networks with postings and conferences on Tibet like CanTibNet or talk.politics.tibet?

BARNETT: CanTibNet is a big step up in the whole issue because it takes all our postings and sends them on to other people, which is great. We are keen on CanTibNet because they print uneditorialized text from Reuters and other wire services. They print some editorial material, too. They're intelligent guys and when they print something from Reuters it's from Reuters, and Dharamsala, Dharamsala. It is signposted, so that is healthy.

MCLAGAN: Who subscribes to TIN? You've said you don't know who reads it online.

BARNETT: The key subscribers are the distributors of news, the wire services. It wasn't what we had in mind when we started, but the wire services, particularly the Beijing-based wire services, are important in terms of impact, because if they print something it goes to X million people. One or two governments also subscribe, which is of significance, as well as some newspapers.

MCLAGAN: Like the *New York Times*? I've noticed they've been crediting TIN in their stories on Tibet more frequently in the last year.

BARNETT: Yes, but you see it has to do with the culture of China watchers. We're only perceived to be of significance by China watchers, by specialists in Chinese politics. It is only those people who see what we do as being of wider significance. This is the sociology of journalism. We don't bother with television journalism; it's a waste of time because they don't have any perception for the specialist interest. They respond to campaign groups, which shows how low they are actually. You know once they get on television it's because other campaign groups are hassling them, saying, "Look, we got video, we got pictures of people being shot."

The television journalists do not have a perception of real significance.

They only have a perception of incidents. That's very damaging to their ability to read into events and processes. I mean, their achievement in China has been so abysmally low, their achievement over Tiananmen, their misreading, their provocative action, their dangerous habit of putting people at risk is something I've written about. It is really a condemnation of their profession. But this also applies to freelance journalists. The history of journalism in Tibet is the history of Tibetans being put at risk by freelance journalists or being marginalized or being minimized by the freelancer who had to pay for his trip and so exaggerates or distorts or even puts people at enormous risk, in some cases at the risk of their lives, for a story. But exaggeration or simplification is more common. Simply because it makes Tibetans look like victims. You've heard me say that before.

MCLAGAN: Right.

BARNETT: But if you look at the journalists who are full time specialists, either because they are on radio, like the BBC World Service, which has an East Asia department, or because they are based in Beijing, their level of expertise, professionalism, intellectual resources, and the principles they bring to their work is entirely different. We communicate to those people. Those are the people that we admire, that we in a sense model ourselves on. In that we are Tibet watchers and they're China watchers and they have a long-standing commitment to being able to understand and interpret processes.

So this is a radical schism within the trade. We don't have a life really outside those China people, except in Hong Kong, because Hong Kong thinks that anything about Tibet is interesting now. They didn't when we first started talking to them, but they have changed in the last three years.

MCLAGAN: Can we get a little more macro here and move beyond the mechanics. How do you think TIN has affected the Tibet Movement?

BARNETT: It has invited Dharamsala to adopt similar approaches and techniques. I wouldn't be able to say this authoritatively because I have no idea whether it's true, but I would guess that it has given Dharamsala ideas about how to present information in ways that are more Western-friendly. Updates, short items, focused targeted items on a factual basis. They might have been doing it anyway, actually, they were doing fantastic stuff in the sixties.

MCLAGAN: But if you had to sum up for someone who didn't know anything about the movement, how would you say that you have affected things?

BARNETT: Well, in a sense, there wasn't anything else before, but we have created at least one area of information which appears to describe what's happening but doesn't have a political agenda. That's the optimum interpretation of what we've done. I would reject anything that was given to me by the exile government or a lobby group. I would look to see if there is any organization whose reputation, whose survival, and income depended on them being accurate, or relatively accurate. That's what we try to do. Because we don't have

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any other interest, we can't survive unless we produce accurate information, so it's in our own interest to get it right. Therefore, if we happen to find information that says something that Dharamsala is also saying, then there is a better chance of being believed. We make it into the media. Now Dharamsala has started to make it into media as well in the same way.

Two things are happening now which I don't entirely approve of, but they're very interesting. One is, in the last few weeks the wire services in Beijing have started to print Dharamsala releases, which they've never done before. Partly because there's one very, very smart Tibetan trained at Columbia, Tseten Samdup, who's started to copy his Dharamsala material to the same people we send stuff to—AP [Associated Press] and AFP [Agence France Presse] and so on.

MCLAGAN: So he writes a press release in London and faxes it to Reuters in Beijing, and it comes out under the government in exile's name?

BARNETT: Yes. In the past this was always done by AFP and sometimes Reuters out of Delhi. But it was never highly rated, it just didn't have authority because it's not from a Beijing source. They are not experts, but now for the last month Tseten has been using our approach of going to Beijing, and they've printed a couple of his releases from Dharamsala. More importantly, we find him a really helpful person in that he supports entirely our principle of maintaining independence at all costs.

There's other very interesting news. There is material coming out of Tibet recently that is high in factual content. The latest appeal to come out of Tibet, which was a bit related to our own contacts and which ostensibly comes from a village in Tibet, appears to be very direct and purely factual. Although it came through our contacts—it may have been altered in the process, I don't know—but it has no rhetoric or emotional appeal. It just says we want support from the UN for the following situation and then describes the situation without exaggeration or flourish. That's culturally really extraordinary. That's exactly the kind of new culture we've invited and that has developed.

The link is that we were approached by the VOA [Voice of America], which has a daily broadcast in Tibetan, and they did a number of interviews with us about what TIN's ideas are regarding what constitutes valuable information. They then broadcast the interviews about facticity and the Western idea of what a valid statement is into Tibet.

They say that VOA has enormous impact, that it is the one thing Tibetans talk about all the time. VOA is quite strict itself in what it puts out. The increase in quality that I'm seeing is because VOA is probably broadcasting in that quality, not because I said it on the radio. It is because Tibetans are hearing everyday news broadcasts in a VOA form which is very careful. They report whether a story is confirmed or not, they use very restrained language and are very cautious and precise—it is quite impressive. So that is what is

having the impact. The use of radio in Tibet is widespread. Actually, videos have a big impact as well.

MCLAGAN: How do conferences and online journals or newsletters, such as CanTibNet or talk.politics.tibet, advance the Tibet Movement or serve the Tibetan community? Or is all this posting futile?

BARNETT: Well, I don't have any interest in the movement; I don't know what that means. I mean, I'm not interested in the Tibet Movement so I wouldn't answer the first part of your question. We haven't talked about e-mail; that's person to person. We get fantastic value out of being able to transfer large amounts of information directly to people with computers. Especially using confidential procedures.

MCLAGAN: You are talking about communicating via e-mail with Amnesty or Asia Watch or with people who are outside.

BARNETT: Amnesty, Asia Watch, some of these environmental organizations, our specialists, people who are academics, people who work on the issue. It's incredibly useful for us to be able to send a detailed long stretch of something very fast. For example, the database analysis of prisoners is done by somebody who is changing addresses every week and phones into his e-mail box every day from wherever he is and picks up our prisoner list, which we e-mail to him and he then puts it into a database so the analysis of prisoners is done by some guy traveling around the world. And we talk to him everyday. And if we want to we can make it secure. In this respect e-mail is not futile at all.

We are creating a corpus of material that can be accessed by either conference or the CanTibNet archive. In a way, it's not very good because it doesn't do anything, it just sits there and waits for somebody to use it, but as it happens there are people who want to use it. So even though we are independent, it is an entirely dependent process because we don't carry anything through to anywhere. Although we call ourselves pragmatic action, we're not in that we don't have any end. The same with CTN in a way, although it does include some demands and requests for action.

MCLAGAN: I would say that CanTibNet's orientation is activist and what you are saying is that your orientation is not activist, at least directly.

BARNETT: It isn't activist at all. It's just that the material is used by activists. We don't see ourselves as part of an activist movement, although we are aware that activists see us as part of their movement.

There is a complex subdivision. We say we are just providing resources, information, to people who want it. If the Chinese want it, that's fine. Information that says that China's wonderful, if it was news, we'd print it. As it is, we don't need to; China prints enough news saying it's wonderful. If we had news saying Dharamsala was committing atrocities, if it was news, we'd print that, too. No question. There is a sense of exposing atrocities as implicitly

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activist, but I would say that journalists represent, by their existence, a pragmatist activist statement that information should be allowed to flow.

The information that we print about human rights is incidental in the sense that because it makes the most news at the moment, it gets printed. In two years' time, it will just be news about social and economic conditions. Because hopefully they will have cleaned up the human rights problems in Tibet and we won't be seen as activist in quite that way.

From: IN%"tin@gn.apc.org" "Robbie Barnett" 19-May-1993 19:20:12:24

To: IN%"tin-list@UTORGPU@bitnet"

Subj: Arrests, Torture Fears During Diplomats Visit

TIN News Update / May 19, 1993

Arrests and Fear of Torture in Lhasa During EC Visit

Reports are coming in of a wave of arrests in the Tibetan capital, Lhasa, amidst growing fears that three key prisoners arrested last week are being tortured in prison. The arrests could torpedo last-minute attempts to get President Clinton to renew unconditionally China's special trade privileges with the US, due for renewal by June 3rd.

Dozens of suspected dissidents are said to have been detained in Lhasa in the last few days, according to claims received today from unofficial sources in the city. The arrests appear to be an attempt to prevent Tibetans from disrupting a visit to Lhasa by a group of western diplomats representing the 12 countries of the European Community.

Police are believed to have accused the group of planning to deliver a letter to the diplomats about human rights conditions in Tibet. Passing of information about human rights conditions to foreigners is regarded in Chinese law as an act of espionage, which in certain circumstances carry the death sentence. One of the three detainees arrested last Thursday, 46-year old Gendun Rinchen, from Eastern Tibet, speaks good English and is well-known to foreigners as one of the best tour guides in Lhasa.

The following interview with Tseten Samdup took place in the Office of Tibet in the Kilburn section of London, on 23 December 1993.

MCLAGAN: I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about your work. Has it changed in the last few years, since you've been in London?

SAMDUP: Well, the Office of Tibet London is a de facto embassy, but without status and recognition. People expect us to have the same sort of services as an embassy, except of course we can't issue visas. The nature of my work is

mainly to keep tabs on what the media are saying about Tibet, to try to plant stories, to keep the journalists happy. Whether a story is good or bad is not important. What is important is that they are getting information about developments inside Tibet as well as within the exile community. I do a lot of compiling and analyzing of information, and sending it on to organizations which in turn distribute it further.

There has been a big change in the flow of information with the introduction of new technologies. When you get more involved with this sort of work, you find that a simple fax machine is not enough. You need a fax/modem because that enables you to just sit there and type out something, for example, a press release, and use preprogrammed addresses to send it automatically at midnight, when the phone rates are cheap, rather than having to sit there and do it, one by one. That's the advantage of a fax/modem.

I have also been using e-mail, both Compuserve as well as GreenNet. I use GreenNet mainly to send out information and for networking, and Compuserve to download wire service stories on Tibet. I find England much more capitalistic than America in terms of communications.

MCLAGAN: Really?

SAMDUP: Yes, there are so many more restrictions than in America. For instance, when I was at Columbia University, I could just go to the library and punch in Tibet, and I'd get all the newspaper and magazine stories from Lexis/Nexis. I can do that on Compuserve, but it's expensive. At Columbia, it was free. That is my frustration now. I know there is information out there but I find getting it is expensive. And because we don't have the funds, we have to depend upon people's generosity. With Lexis/Nexis you can get American and British newspapers, but here each time you want to search for a newspaper article on Compuserve, it's five pounds for a search. Plus ten pounds or something like that for each story you download. So it's forbiddingly expensive to do it.

MCLAGAN: Please describe to me what your media strategy is.

SAMDUP: Our media strategy is very simple. To get as many positive stories on Tibet published as possible. Not in any sort of forum, but in mainstream newspapers or magazines that are important. We haven't been as successful with regional newspapers because of lack of resources.

MCLAGAN: Your focus is on British media?

SAMDUP: Actually, this office is responsible for Tibetan affairs in the Nordic countries, the Republic of Ireland, Iceland, and the UK, but we have to limit our circles. As I said, with the British, we have done well, and I think it is partly to do with the media sympathy for Tibet. That is our advantage. If it wasn't there, we would really have a tough time getting our message across.

Also, it helps that I have a degree in journalism and that I know how a journalist functions, and how to judge whether a story that comes from Tibet, In-

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dia, or Nepal is important or not. You can't put in every story because they will get annoyed and you will lose your credibility.

MCLAGAN: Can you talk about that? How do you decide if something is important when it comes in?

SAMDUP: Well, for instance, when something comes across my desk which we have doubts about, we try to cross-check with different sources, or try to make sure that Dharamsala has more information. If there is no information, then I tell people that we can't confirm it. We try not to do that too often. I think because we represent His Holiness the Dalai Lama we are viewed as a credible source. On the other hand, because we are a government, people think that we are portraying our point of view and not the general consensus. Sometimes the media tend not to come to us, they try to go to independent organizations instead, which is frustrating, because sometimes we have information.

If something happens in Tibet, I should not be calling Tibet to ask what is going on. Being a government, you have certain unwritten laws that you are not supposed to break. So I call Hong Kong and Beijing, I talk to the journalists, mostly the wire service people.

MCLAGAN: What do you mean you are not supposed to call?

SAMDUP: It's like an American diplomat might not call Cuba or Russia. There's no such thing as saying you can't do it, it's just that you censor yourself.

MCLAGAN: So you wouldn't call Tibet to have a story confirmed?

SAMDUP: I've done it in the past when we have received reports of demonstrations. I have picked up the phone and called one of the Lhasa hotels or police station or bus station to say, "I have some relatives visiting Tibet, I haven't heard from them, have they been in the disturbance, I believe there was something today in so and so place, is it true?" Mostly people deny it, but when they do you know that they are doing it because the phones are monitored, and I have been able to sense the nervousness in the person's voice. So we do call. Sometimes when I try to call Lhasa to get a story, if I can't get an answer, I call Beijing to say, "Look I'm having problems getting Lhasa, do you know what's happening?" So that alerts them there's a story, check it out.

MCLAGAN: One of the things Robbie said in his discussion with me was that you had started going to the Beijing wire services and were able to plant stories that way. Can you talk a little bit about this strategy?

SAMDUP: Basically, when you are a journalist, you are looking for scoops. You want exclusives that other people don't have. Sometimes I just show the Beijing reporters the tip of the iceberg, and if I sense that they are interested, I give them the entire story. I do it based on what they have written in the past. I also have a list of people whom they can contact if they want to interview

someone. The moment they sense that you are not organized, that you don't have the information at hand, they hesitate. Being a journalist, I have the advantage of knowing what things people are looking for. Not just supplying stories but also giving them background information as to whether the story was touched by somebody, if so, which angle it was covered, and so on. Most journalists are pressed for time. How much homework you do helps a great deal in planting the story as well as making the person feel easy, because if he finds that there's a story but it's difficult to write, next time he hesitates. I function as a backup, someone who's going to provide him information, arrange for him to speak to different people. That's very important.

The advantage of being in London is that we have the BBC here. Besides Americans, everyone listens to the BBC World Service. From that point of view it is very important that we get our stories as much as possible on the BBC. Of course, CNN is important, but people think that CNN is American propaganda. Same for the Voice of America.

Anyway, one of my main tasks is to work with the BBC. They are very interested in Tibetan developments. Whenever there's a story I make sure that they can talk to someone higher up in India to confirm or to give the official government line. Sometimes the journalists will talk to me, but because I'm just an individual, with no status, they will take my background briefing but they will not quote me by name, only as an official.

When I have a story, I send a press release. I call people, for instance, David Watts at the *Times*. I say, "David, did you get the story?" He says "Yes, except I don't think I'm going to do it this time." Then I call the *Financial Times*: "Alex, did you get the story? What do you think about it?" He says, "Well, I'm sitting on it." It means it's not good. Then I try again, I push and say, "Look, this is really important for these reasons."

One of the disadvantages of being in London is that there is no access to Tibet. People can't just walk in or out of Tibet. So if there is something happening in Tibet, you can't provide the media with footage or sound bites. I'll give you an example of what happened in May this year, when demonstrations broke out. I called the BBC television editor John Simpson—I've spoken to him before because he wanted to interview the Dalai Lama, so I had his personal number. I called him up and said, "Look, this is happening in Tibet, you've got to do a story on this, because this has not happened for three or four years and the European ambassador is there." He said, "Look, you guys never warned me about it." How could we have known? There's not any warning, it happened spontaneously! Then he said, "There's no footage." I said, "What do you mean there's no footage? Not everyone gets to go in!" I told him, "You can use old footage, you can tell the story from that." Then I said, "You know, you guys have access to Bosnia, and everyday you have a story from there, but when something breaks in Tibet, why aren't you out

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doing the story?" He said, "You have a point there." And they did a story. I'm not saying that it's because of me, but you've just got to push them, make them more aware. So from that point of view, perseverance helps.

I think the biggest advantage for us is when the Dalai Lama comes here, because all the top journalists call you. That's the time when you can say, "Can you give me your private number?" Then you are able to keep the number and use it in the future. I take advantage of that when His Holiness is coming to town.

MCLAGAN: And then they meet him?

SAMDUP: Not all of them get to meet him, but if they want to interview him they have to give me a number where I can contact them, and usually they have high hopes that they are going to get the interview so they give me a number, which is more or less a classified or private number.

MCLAGAN: So you find that you have much greater access when His Holiness is coming to town?

SAMDUP: Oh yes, definitely. Much greater. When His Holiness comes to town, we are really important [*laughs*]. Otherwise we are not important. We are important, I suppose, from the story point of view, because the Dalai Lama is a story. He creates stories.

MCLAGAN: Tell me why he is a story.

SAMDUP: I guess he's a story because he's this mysterious man. He's always laughing. So much has happened to his country yet he talks about compassion, love, and doesn't talk about violence. Most leaders, whose countries have suffered, talk about violence, so I think they want to know what's so special about this person. They might know the Dalai Lama but they might not know about Tibet. He's more important; he's more of a known entity than Tibet itself.

MCLAGAN: So that's what makes him news?

SAMDUP: Yes, I think that is what makes him news. Being head of a refugee community that's doing well, also Chinese oppression in Tibet, all the Tibetan people have stuck together as a community under a leadership which causes people to ask what makes him so unique.

From: IN%"ctn-editors@utcc.utoronto.ca"

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Subj: CTN 93/06/10 20:10 GMT

-----CanTibNet Newsletter -----

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We encourage discussion on articles. Send us your comments, announcements, news or items for discussion.

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Anthony Whitworth, WCHR Project  
Association for Progressive Communications

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE—10 June 1993

Dalai Lama's Address to NGO's Forum in Vienna Cancelled

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His Holiness the Dalai Lama's planned address to the Non-Governmental Organization Forum at the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna has been cancelled due to Chinese pressure.

Mr. Manfred Novak, the Director of the Vienna Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights and senior member of the Joint NGO Planning Committee informed the Tibetan delegation this afternoon that due to strong pressure His Holiness' participation in the NGO forum has been cancelled.

In addition, the planned seminar, Tibet: 43 Years of Human Rights Violations, on June 22, part of the NGO parallel activities, has also been cancelled.

Tashi Wangdi, the leader of the Tibetan Government-in-exile's delegation, said he regrets that under pressure His Holiness' address to over 3000 Non-Governmental Organizations will not proceed.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the 1989 Nobel Peace Laureate, was invited to Vienna by the Austrian Foreign Minister Dr. Alois Mock to participate in parallel events in connection with the World conference. His Holiness is due to arrive in Vienna on Sunday, June 13.

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Fax: 022 738-79-40

MCLAGAN: The Dalai Lama was certainly news last summer. I know you were in Vienna at the World Conference on Human Rights, and I wondered if you could tell me what role you played in shaping the story that came out about the controversy?

SAMDUP: My main role was to work with the media. What happened was

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this: China tried to block the Dalai Lama from speaking. Neither the journalists nor the NGOs knew why the Chinese were doing it, why China was being so bad. So that became a story. Why won't they let a person who won the Nobel Peace Prize speak? Why is this person so powerful that China doesn't want him to speak? So China became the bad guy. They became even more so when they did not allow the NGOs to sit in on the drafting committee of the declaration.<sup>22</sup>

It is like what His Holiness says, "Your enemy is your best teacher. Your enemy lets you do things for yourself." If His Holiness is traveling and China just keeps quiet, he might not get that much attention. But because China makes so much *noise*, because it tells the British Foreign Office that it must not receive the Dalai Lama, it's a story! To give you the latest example, there was a documentary film about Mao Tse-tung that was broadcast here on Monday. Before that, the Chinese tried to tell the British they couldn't air it. The Chinese don't have the faintest idea of what a free press is, what they can or cannot do. When they behave like that, people wonder, why is China so vicious? If they think they can tell us here what we should or shouldn't do, imagine what they do to their own people.

MCLAGAN: How did the decision to bar His Holiness get reversed?

SAMDUP: I think it got reversed in various ways. There was strong, strong pressure from the press.

MCLAGAN: Press, meaning print journalists or everyone?

SAMDUP: Everyone. CNN had a story almost every day saying, "The Dalai Lama has come here, invited as a guest of the Austrian government, to a conference on human rights, why isn't this man allowed to speak?" Also, the NGOs were frustrated because they were there to make sure that everyone had human rights and here a world leader was being denied his rights. Third, the Austrian government invited His Holiness, and their guest was more or less being told that he couldn't come to a conference that had been organized in the Austrian capital. So there were various factors.

MCLAGAN: Did you put out stories from Vienna?

SAMDUP: Oh yes. My main story was about what was happening, what we thought about it. But it was a very tricky situation for us. We couldn't really put out too many stories. We had to talk to people more or less in confidence. We didn't try too hard to project the Dalai Lama because that's not what we consider important. We wanted to talk about the Tibetan issue, not the Dalai Lama. The Tibetan issue is the major issue, the Dalai Lama is one individual, he's our leader, but he is not the story. The story is the suffering of the Tibetan people in Tibet. The Dalai Lama, being the leader of the Tibetans, he's the spokesperson of these people, so therefore he has to get the opportunity to speak. That was our point. We wanted to be careful as to how it was portrayed. We wanted the journalists to know that there was real concern among

the honorary delegates that they be able to hear what the Dalai Lama had to say. But we didn't want it to appear that we Tibetans were imposing our view on the organizers that the Dalai Lama should speak.

MCLAGAN: What was your communications strategy?

SAMDUP: We haunted the e-mail center set up by the Association for Progressive Communications every day. Actually, I will read you something [from the IGC newsletter] which you will be quite surprised at. It says, "APC at Vienna UN Human Rights Conference. The first day APC opened for public use, the Tibetan delegation pounded out messages, appeals, press releases, and endless e-mail messages to their office in London in an effort to get the Dalai Lama to be allowed to come to the conference. Their effort paid off. The Tibetan leader visited the Austrian center a couple of days later. A large number of the Tibetans here experienced how e-mail can help them in their work, the London office communicated daily with the Tibetan delegation in Vienna."

MCLAGAN: So they actually made your use of their network a story?

SAMDUP: They made it into a story to demonstrate how people were using their online center, how so many people used it, including these Tibetans, who were using their computer and e-mail services to send messages and press releases, and so on. As I said, that's how we become stories.

MCLAGAN: It sounds as though the APC communications setup was effective.

SAMDUP: Oh yes, very effective. Frankly, it would have been more effective if I had known more about e-mail. But at that time I had just been online a couple of months. In Vienna I made sure that all the stories I was putting out on human rights came out in the APC United Nations Human Rights Conference because that is a permanent record, it houses all the official documents, press releases, etc., and people have access to it.

MCLAGAN: That is how I got interested in the Vienna Conference, when I saw on PeaceNet that APC had set up an online center for people to use to communicate with other conference participants and with the rest of the world. Then when His Holiness was barred, I became interested in how this technology was being used to mobilize public support.

SAMDUP: The day we were told that we were not being allowed in, I don't remember the exact date, but it was a Sunday. We did a press release, went to post office to fax it, but it was closed. I was stuck. Then I ran into one of the organizers of the APC center who said he knew about the Tibetans. "Don't worry," he said, "I will help you send out all your e-mail, you can send faxes to Dharamsala and your other offices." So we went to the center, and there were a whole lot of nice people there who knew about Tibet and were sympathetic to us, and they let us use the facilities.

MCLAGAN: Do you read the Tibet conferences on the computer?

SAMDUP: In the [unclear] from nothing to some of proportion.

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SAMDUP: In the s that rather scary. Ne letter, each day the especially since I ha

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MCLAGAN: One c computer-mediated racy. I wondered if y

SAMDUP: In the last two years the conferences on Tibet have developed from nothing to something really big. My worry now is that it is getting out of proportion.

MCLAGAN: Really? In what sense?

SAMDUP: In the sense that every story on Tibet is getting put online. I find that rather scary. Now that I'm the European editor of the *CanTibNet Newsletter*, each day there are six or seven stories, and it's a little overwhelming, especially since I have other responsibilities.

If we had access to Lexis/Nexis, then we'd have a wider range to choose from and could be more selective as to what we publish. At the moment, we are limited by what people give us; we are at the mercy of our sources. Suppose that *CanTibNet Newsletter* gets access to Lexis/Nexis and they start using it, I think most of the subscribers would just say, "Okay, we don't want it anymore, it's too much, we can't handle it." So from nothing you go to something and then when you reach that something, people are worried that it is too much.

MCLAGAN: So basically you are feeding Nima and Conrad [coeditors of the former CanTibNet] in Canada with information that comes to you.

SAMDUP: I'm just a broker, I take it and pass it along [*laughs*]. So that's what I'm getting scared of, it gets too overwhelming. I think we should break up CTN into different conferences. Political, cultural, economic.

MCLAGAN: So you don't feel that computers are the answer to everything in terms of publicizing the Tibet issue?

SAMDUP: Everyone says that the computer will solve everything. The computer will not solve the problem of spreading information. It's just a vehicle in the sense that technology enables you to do something at a faster speed; at no time does it lessen your workload. I would challenge anybody who says otherwise. It gives you more work.

MCLAGAN: To get back to the issue of computer networks and conferences, what purposes do you think they serve?

SAMDUP: These networks save the person who is doing a story a lot of time if he can send it online. He doesn't have to send a fax, he doesn't have to seal envelopes, he can e-mail his story directly to everyone on the mailing list.

In terms of the various conferences that one can go into, like the Asia human rights forum on GreenNet, I think those are the areas that we should look into. We need to contact different networks and ask them what forums they have and then target the appropriate ones. We need to not only reach more people but reach different areas. That's very important, but we haven't been able to do that yet.

MCLAGAN: One of the things that people in America always assert is that computer-mediated communication like fax and computers facilitate democracy. I wondered if you've heard that.

SAMDUP: Well, in America anything promotes democracy. What's the first act in the Constitution?

MCLAGAN: The First Amendment?

SAMDUP: Yes, the First Amendment. You Americans go for anything First Amendment. When I was doing my Columbia journalism course, we had an American lawyer as well as a *New York Times* columnist, Anthony Lewis, teach us about the First Amendment, and it came to a point when I was telling somebody, "I think the First Amendment will do the job for you, it defends you against the government, against everything."

But the issue of democratic use of computers has practical aspects as well. In America, you can make one phone call and speak for three hours for ten pence. In this country you can't. I was talking to the *CanTibNet Newsletter* people and I said, "Fine, you have a lot of stories, but you've got to realize that people have to spend money to read them."

MCLAGAN: So in that sense information is costly.

SAMDUP: Outside of North America, information is costly. For instance, if Dharamsala wants to send something, they have to dial New Delhi, they can't just dial locally, there's no local host. It gets very expensive.<sup>23</sup>

MCLAGAN: What do you think about the discourse on cyberspace?

SAMDUP: I think it is totally overblown. Does everyone in the third world have access to a computer, do they own a phone? If you don't have them, how can you say that these technologies help democracy? If people have to boil water, but they don't have fuel, how can they boil water? If there is no water, how can you wash your hands? You can wash your hands with some dirty water, but that doesn't do the trick. I think it is democracy for the privileged. I would call it democracy for the haves, not for the have-nots.

MCLAGAN: One of the ways in which people claim that these networks are democratic is that supposedly they enable people to shift positions from being consumers of information to being producers of information.

SAMDUP: That's true, but it varies from person to person, frankly speaking. Previously I was a consumer, now I'm sending out information, so my position has changed. It is part of my work. Someone like you would only send out information regarding you.

One thing I've noticed is that you become much more greedy, not in terms of economic materialism, but you become obsessed with the technology, with upgrading. Now that I have a fax/modem, I want a scanner.

MCLAGAN: Yes. It's very addictive. I wanted to talk to you a little bit about your idea of what constitutes information. When you put your stories out, are you putting them out with an end in mind?

SAMDUP: Well, I put out information according to our own agenda. What we want people to know about, what our organization is doing. A lot of the

information that CanTibNet has about Tibet, but here at the exile wants to say about

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SAMDUP: Robbie is what he thinks is impossible than us. See, our interest in Tibet.

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information that CanTibNet puts out is what other people are saying about Tibet, but here at the Office of Tibet London, it is what the government in exile wants to say about Tibet.

MCLAGAN: And how is that different from what Robbie does?

SAMDUP: Robbie is not accountable to us. He is independent and writes what he thinks is important. He is credible, but I wouldn't say he is more credible than us. See, our agendas are different. Our agenda is to create more of an interest in Tibet.

MCLAGAN: What is his agenda?

SAMDUP: His agenda is to monitor developments in Tibet. Those two things are different.

MCLAGAN: How would you say the media typically represents Tibet over here?

SAMDUP: Very sympathetically.

MCLAGAN: Is it a sophisticated representation?

SAMDUP: What do you mean by that?

MCLAGAN: Well, is it stereotyped? Is it dumb, stupid, uninformed?

SAMDUP: Yes, sometimes it can be really dumb, and I get frustrated. Why don't they just call on the phone and ask us, "Is this story true or not?" Or, "Can you comment on this?" But as a journalist I know the limitations people face. There's a five o'clock deadline, you have no time to make a phone call, so you write something, and sometimes you make a mistake.

MCLAGAN: For instance, during the Year of Tibet I collected press clippings, and it seemed like a lot of the coverage was fairly inane and problematic in terms of making Tibetans seem like cuddly panda bears. In other words, not serious about their struggle.

SAMDUP: It is an attitude everyone has. You want to make it sensational. A Tibetan, does he know how to eat? Can he work a computer? Does he know what's inside a computer? They try to give an image that this guy is from another world, who doesn't know what's happening. That has its advantages and disadvantages, because people say, "Oh, this is interesting," then they learn about Tibet. But you have to go beyond the impression that creates. The first step is that people know about Tibet. The second step relates to what their knowledge of Tibet is. Do they think Tibetans are primitive or barbaric, do they think Tibetans are advanced? Do they think Tibetans are sympathetic, passionate? What do they think of Tibet? First reach them and then work on what they think about Tibet. Sometimes when journalists write, my boss says, "I just don't take much notice of it because I'm a journalist and I don't identify with the problem."

For instance, if someone calls up and asks, "What shoes does the Dalai Lama wear?" or, "Are the glasses he wears made by so and so company?" I

think to myself, is it important? Is it relevant? It is not important but people want to add flavor to their story. But when you add too much flavor, you lose the real central theme that we would like people to talk about.

MCLAGAN: Which is?

SAMDUP: Which is the suffering of Tibetans, the loss of their country, the fact that they are refugees. Again, when you say refugees, people talk about you as though you are pathetic, that you need attention. It has a lot to do with people's understanding of the situation, of what a refugee is and what a refugee goes through. If that understanding is not good, then the story suffers.

I take myself as an example. When I was at Columbia I specialized in international and diplomatic reporting. I had no problems with it, though some of my American classmates did because their knowledge of international affairs was not as good as mine. But I had problems in terms of local reporting. I didn't know much about the drug or housing problems in New York and didn't want to do things like court reporting.

MCLAGAN: Do you think this job is something you will stay with?

SAMDUP: I will stay with this so long as I feel the environment is good and that I'm useful. If someone asks me do you think you will go back to India, can you do the job effectively there, I would say no. Because in this office, there are two people. If you get something from Dharamsala, the boss gives it to you and you do it. If there's something happening in Tibet, I can pick up the phone and talk to the foreign minister and say, "This is happening, they are going to call me for more information, what should I say?" I'm able to talk to the people who are responsible for making policy. If I was in Dharamsala, I might not be very close to His Holiness—I'm not talking about a close working relationship, but in terms of close physical contact. When he comes here, I am close to him. Of course, I would go back to India if the government asked me to.

MCLAGAN: One of the things I talked with Robbie about was his commitment to Western standards of facticity. He said that he felt that at times Dharamsala did not show this commitment. Do you have any thoughts on that?

SAMDUP: I agree with him, but at the same time, Robbie has to understand that when you are dealing with an organization or a government that is in Asia, it is not in the West. So the person is not in Hampstead. The person is how many kilometers away? How people look at journalism there is different.

MCLAGAN: How do they look at journalism?

SAMDUP: They look at any story that is happening in Tibet as important. If something is happening, that's news.

Also, being a government, they wonder if this has come from so-and-so source. Can we release it because it might compromise somebody? But Robbie has to make a decision for himself, he doesn't have to consult the Department of Security or the Kashag. He can just say, "Okay, I think I can do

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it." As the size of an organization grows, the flow of information and communication deteriorates. When you are small it is more effective.

MCLAGAN: But is there a difference between the Tibetan notion and the Western notion of what constitutes information? Do they have different attitudes toward information?

SAMDUP: I think there is a difference in terms of the possessiveness of information. People in the East tend to keep things to themselves. The problem is that the Tibetan people who have escaped from Tibet sometimes don't tell the entire story, because they think, what good would it do? They may report that something has happened, but they don't often give the specific details of how, when, or where it happened. Or various people have come out who exaggerate their stories. So for us the biggest problem is providing accurate information, being observant.

Plus, if we get some information from Tibet and don't use it properly, if we blow covers, we are in trouble. Not only do we put someone at risk but we lose an important source of information. That is one of the reasons why there are a lot of restrictions—we are accountable to the people in Tibet.

The use of computer-mediated communication to address political issues represents a new practice in the post-cold war era, one that is being negotiated piece by piece. In the meantime, we need to develop a discourse that allows us to critically discuss the complexities of this new form of social action. As the interviews with Barnett and Samdup suggest, despite utopian first world (and ethnocentric) pronouncements on computer activism and "virtual communities," which are rooted in a McLuhanesque belief in an electronic democracy, there is still a disjunction between the promise of intercultural solidarity and the reality of cultural, political, and economic differences. Mediators of knowledge like Barnett and Samdup may be able to (temporarily) transcend the limitations of time and space in their computing for Tibet, but it remains to be seen how effective this "virtual" mode of engagement will be in the future. The existing structures of power in Tibet and elsewhere continue to pose a formidable challenge to even the most innovative of activists, and the circulation of information, so often taken for granted in the West, often comes at a high personal price, as this last posting suggests:

From: IN%"tin@gn.apc.org" 26-JUN-1994 02:37:33.92

To: IN%"tin-list@UTORGPU.bitnet"

Subj: 250+ Political Prisoners in Lhasa

TIN News Update / 22 June, 1994 v2/ total no of pages: 3

There are now over 250 political prisoners in Tibet's main prison, more than double the number four years ago, according to detailed reports received from unofficial sources in Lhasa. The number of

women political prisoners in the prison has tripled in the last three years . . . One man, a former school teacher, is serving a 28 year sentence for shouting or writing pro-independence slogans . . . The majority of the 255 prisoners have been convicted of "spreading counter-revolutionary propaganda", a term used by the Chinese to describe shouting a political slogan or distributing a pamphlet. Most of the sentences of 15 years or more have gone to people who formed "counter-revolutionary organisations", meaning that they were in groups that supported independence . . .

Meanwhile unofficial reports continue to emerge from Tibet of the transfer in early April of just over 300 prisoners to remote labour camps in Qinghai, 1200 km north east of Lhasa. It is not clear how many if any of these prisoners were being held for political offences. Although it is common in China itself for prisoners to be sent to remote prisons, this is the first time since the current wave of unrest began 7 years ago that prisoners from the Tibet Autonomous Region have been shifted to another province. The development, a major change in security policy, will enormously hamper monitoring efforts as well as attempts by local Tibetans to ensure that prisoners are supplied with adequate food and clothing.

- end -

#### Notes

This paper is based on research conducted in London in 1993 with the generous support of the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. The writing of this study was made possible by a National Endowment for the Humanities Dissertation Award (FD-21450-93) and a Dean's Dissertation Fellowship from New York University. I am grateful to Robbie Barnett and Tseten Samdup for fitting me into their busy schedules. I would also like to thank Brian Larkin, Faye Ginsburg, Chris Pound, Robyn Brentano, Lisa Keary, and Patti Sunderland for their helpful comments on this piece.

The following is a list of e-mail addresses for some Tibet organizations and offices around the world:

- International Committee of Lawyers for Tibet, USA  
<iclt@igc.apc.org>
- Canada Tibet Committee <richter@utcc.utoronto.ca>
- International Campaign for Tibet <ict@igc.apc.org>
- Office of Tibet, New York <otny@igc.apc.org>
- Office of Tibet, London <tibetlondon@gn.apc.org>
- Alaska Tibet Committee <dpaljor@igc.apc.org>
- Tibet Computing Resource Center, Dharamsala  
<tirc@cta.unv.ernet.in>

1. According to Appadurai, "postnational social formations" are organizations, movements, ideologies, and networks which are not contained or defined solely in relation to the nation-state. They are "more diverse, more fluid, more ad hoc, more pro-

visional, less coherent, advantages of the nations that monitor activities as those that "work to organizations, nongovernmental like the Greens. They support organizations that state" and which are "order" (1993:419).

2. Scholars argue that decade, one that is increasingly has been fostered by the (1991) calls "global civilization of political alliances

3. In saying this, I do universal access to digital

4. Edwards (1994) is conferences by diasporic gage in a form of "simulacrum" group <soc.culture.afgha

5. In the last decade cameras, VCRs, network and cassettes, has created self-expression for many (1990, 1991). Recently, they have played an important role in Russia, and China (see C

6. "Virtual communities" participation in computer the most well-known electronic Link).

7. Doctoral research was City, Washington, D.C., sites in Switzerland, including

8. For instance, the Tibet the United Nations Conference known as the Earth Summit were shut out of the official ences and events, where the Tibetans' high profile was ment into denying the Dalai Lama large and sympathetic

Tibet has also been on Human Rights in Geneva



visional, less coherent, less organized, and simply less implicated in the comparative advantages of the nation-state" (1993:420). They include organizations and movements that monitor activities of the nation-state, such as Amnesty International, as well as those that "work to contain the excesses of the nation-state," such as UN-related organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and biopolitical movements like the Greens. They also include such things as transnational philanthropic movements, international terrorist organizations, and refugee camps, bureaucracies, and support organizations that float in between the "certainties and stabilities of the nation-state" and which are part of "the permanent framework of the emergent, postnational order" (1993:419).

2. Scholars argue that a new kind of global community has emerged in the last decade, one that is increasingly a force in international relations and whose development has been fostered by the explosive growth of NGOs. This community, what Hamelink (1991) calls "global civil society," has gained even more influence with the reorganization of political alliances during the post-cold war period. See also Boulding (1988).

3. In saying this, I do not mean to belittle the political significance of the issue of universal access to digitalized computer networks in this country.

4. Edwards (1994) is an interesting exception. In his account of the use of computer conferences by diasporic Afghans, Edwards argues that Afghans around the world engage in a form of "simulated politics" through heated debates on the USENET newsgroup <soc.culture.afghan>.

5. In the last decade the spread of new media technologies, such as portable video cameras, VCRs, networked computers, cable television, fax, satellite communications, and cassettes, has created the potential for decentralized communication and collective self-expression for many groups around the world (see Ginsburg 1991, 1993; Turner 1990, 1991). Recently, these new media forms, especially computer networks and faxes, have played an important role in the political crises in Thailand (see Hamilton 1993), Russia, and China (see Calhoun 1989).

6. "Virtual communities" are defined as groups of people linked together by their participation in computer networks. See Rheingold (1993) for an explanation of one of the most well-known electronic communities, the WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link).

7. Doctoral research was conducted 1990-93 in the following locations: New York City, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, London, Dharamsala, India, and in multiple sites in Switzerland, including Zurich, Geneva, Horgen, Flawil, Rikon, and Trogen.

8. For instance, the Tibetan delegation, led by the Dalai Lama, made a big splash at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), otherwise known as the Earth Summit, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992. While the Tibetans were shut out of the official proceedings, they attended the simultaneous NGO conferences and events, where they drew attention to environmental devastation in Tibet. The Tibetans' high profile was a result of Chinese attempts to pressure the Brazilian government into denying the Dalai Lama a visa. This generated a barrage of local media coverage, calling on the government to resist such arm-twisting, and ensuring the Dalai Lama large and sympathetic audiences wherever he went.

Tibet has also been on the agenda at the annual meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva since 1991, when a Tibet resolution was sponsored for the

first time in twenty-four years. Although China has managed to persuade enough member nations of the commission to vote for "no action" four years running, the number of countries refusing to criticize China's human rights record has diminished with each passing year.

Finally, Tibetan women has already begun preparations for the UN Fourth World Conference on Women which will be held in Beijing in September 1995. While Tibetan organizations may run into problems receiving NGO accreditation in order to attend the parallel NGO forum, they plan to work with other NGOs to ensure that Tibetan women's issues and concerns are raised at the meeting. Much of the preliminary networking being done by the Tibetan Women's Association, based in Dharamsala, and Western NGOs and Tibet support organizations has taken place via e-mail.

9. The Association for Progressive Communication (APC) is a prime example of the new forms of political association and mobilization which have emerged in recent years. Based in San Francisco, the APC is an international partnership of computer networks that provides low-cost and advanced communications services to activists, educators, community leaders, and policymakers in more than ninety-five countries through a distributed network of host computers. Since its establishment in 1990, the APC has overseen the global operations of PeaceNet, GreenNet, and many other "partner networks" which have sprung up in countries around the world, including Nicaragua, Sweden, Brazil, Canada, Australia, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Russia, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Kenya, and Bolivia. For more information on the history of the APC, see Howard Frederick's "Computer Networks and the Emergence of Global Civil Society: The Case of the Association for Progressive Communications," distributed on-line via the GASSHO newsletter 1, no. 3 (1994).

As of this writing (summer 1994), there are a number of other electronic networks and organizations dedicated to serving the human rights community, including Digital Freedom Net, a Gopher site in New Jersey which houses a library of material by censored writers around the world (the Internet address is <gopher.iaa.org>, and Human Rights Network (HRNet), a multilingual information service which solicits and publishes updates on human rights issues around the world. APC networks also offer human rights conferences <igc.apc.org>. See "On the Internet, Dissidents' Shots Heard 'Round the World," *New York Times*, 5 June 1994.

10. In the context of this piece, *Western* is an analytic, political, and geographical category referring to members of industrialized societies in the Western Hemisphere. It is in keeping with the Tibetan term *inji*, which originally referred to the English, the first non-Asian foreigners Tibetans had extensive contact with, but which today is used by Tibetans to refer to any person from the West, regardless of nationality. It usually connotes whiteness.

11. My use of the term *friends* is not an attempt to be ironic; it is the word used by Tibetans when speaking to and about their supporters in public. I draw attention to it simply because the word encodes a particularly Tibetan conception of social relations between individuals and political entities, that of patron-client, or *mchod-yon*, which is explained in the text.

12. The total number of individuals who fled in 1959 is unknown; estimates range anywhere between 60,000 and 80,000. Today there are roughly 100,000 Tibetans living outside Tibet, the majority of whom are concentrated in settlements in India and Nepal.

The largest concentration of Tibetans in the world is in the V... home to approximately 2... tion of Tibetans in the V... roughly 1,500 Tibetans.

13. Klieger argues th... "differential misundersta... that defined the relations... Tibetan interpretations, i... to at least the 17th centu... tice, the Tibetan state, a... equal to those agents wh... rights of interference in... into a *mchod-yon* relatio... cording to native interpre...

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14. Though the focus... support of Tibetans must... gave refuge to the Dalai... It also provided land in a... Lama settled, and Karnat... lished. The Indians help... other resources in the ea... connection to Tibet, whic... has long died out.

15. See Bishop (1989)

16. Quoted in DeVoe

17. In a recent article... Shakya articulates a view... the Tibetan intelligentsia... and imposed its yearning... In the same process, the... Tibetans are seen merely... decades of being reduced... process of reduction of Ti... complete.

18. The Dalai Lama h... place and Tibetans as peac... step toward resolving the... of peace, or *ahimsa*, the... which associates Tibet w... Turkestan (just north of T...

The largest concentration of Tibetans found outside of Asia is in Switzerland, which is home to approximately 2,000 refugees and their families. The second largest concentration of Tibetans in the West is located in the United States, which has a population of roughly 1,500 Tibetans.

13. Klieger argues that the conflict between Tibetans and Chinese can be seen as a "differential misunderstanding of the traditional pattern of the patron/client framework that defined the relationship between the two polities in the past. . . . According to native Tibetan interpretations, in both modern refugee praxis as well as in native records back to at least the 17th century, no hint of client subordination can be seen. In native practice, the Tibetan state, as the estate of the Dalai Lama, should be considered at least equal to those agents which support it materially. A patron, however powerful, has no rights of interference in the affairs of his or her sacred client. The empire, by entering into a *mchod-yon* relationship with the Tibetan hierarch, and consequently Tibet, according to native interpretation, obtained no rights of sovereignty" (1992: 19).

There is no stigma attached to being a recipient of patronage; in fact, quite the opposite is true, as Klieger noted while conducting fieldwork in Dharamsala: "The acquisition of foreign patrons is a device for obtaining prestige in the lay refugee community" (1992: 104). Indeed, from a Buddhist perspective, it is honorable to be in a position to receive, as the client is providing the patron a vehicle by which the latter may accumulate spiritual merit. See also DeVoe (1983) and Nowak (1984).

14. Though the focus is on Western supporters in this piece, India's long-standing support of Tibetans must be acknowledged. First and foremost, the Indian government gave refuge to the Dalai Lama and his government and thousands of destitute Tibetans. It also provided land in a number of places, including Himachal Pradesh where the Dalai Lama settled, and Karnataka, in the south, where several large settlements were established. The Indians helped the refugees create a Tibetan school system and supplied other resources in the early years of resettlement. Indians have always felt a spiritual connection to Tibet, which preserved a form of Buddhism that originated in India but has long died out.

15. See Bishop (1989) and Lopez (1994).

16. Quoted in DeVoe (1985: 1230).

17. In a recent article in *Tibetan Review*, United Kingdom-based scholar Tsering Shakya articulates a view of Western involvement with Tibet that is held by many of the Tibetan intelligentsia: "The West has always reduced Tibet to its image of Tibet, and imposed its yearning of spirituality and solace from the material world onto Tibet. In the same process, the West has sought to define the Tibetan political struggle. Tibetans are seen merely as victims who are unable to speak for themselves. . . . After decades of being reduced to the status of mere recipients of charity and sympathy, the process of reduction of Tibetans to an endangered species of the human family is nearly complete.

18. The Dalai Lama himself frequently describes old Tibet as a uniquely spiritual place and Tibetans as peace-loving, nonviolent, spiritual people. By proposing, as a first step toward resolving the future status of Tibet, that the plateau be established as a zone of peace, or *ahimsa*, the Dalai Lama is evoking a traditional Buddhist eschatology which associates Tibet with Shambala, thought to be both a physical area in eastern Turkistan (just north of Tibet) and a metaphysical "pure land," filled with enlightened

beings. In so doing, the Dalai Lama is imagining a future for Tibet in keeping with the Kalachakra tantra's prophecy of a golden age of peace and one that offers the possibility of spiritual fulfillment in a secularized world (see Brentano 1993).

What does it cost Tibetans to represent themselves in this way? Tibetan complicity in perpetuating a stereotypical image of Tibetans as victims and/or special spiritual beings cannot be gone into here, but it is worth pointing out that at the heart of the Tibet Movement is a contradiction. The contradiction is between the need to portray themselves a certain way (for example, as refugees, victims of human rights abuses, people whose unique religious culture is endangered) in order to garner support and reproduce themselves in exile, and the need to put themselves forward in the international arena as empowered political actors with an agenda of their own. By accepting Western discourses and representations, Tibetans facilitate their struggle in certain arenas and inhibit its progress in other fronts.

19. The address for World Tibet Network News is <wtn-editors@utcc.utoronto.ca>. Tibet Information Network's address is <tin@gn.apc.org>. Tibet News Digest has been merged with CanTibNet to form World Tibet Network News (see above). The TIBET-L discussion list address is <Listserv@iubvm.ucs.indiana.edu>. <Talk.politics.tibet> is a USENET newsgroup.

The Tibet Electronic Resource Guide (TERG) is a directory of computer network addresses of research facilities, archives, online databases, and resources of interest to the scholars and students of Tibet and Tibetan studies. To access tibet-electrsrc-guid-terg.txt, use the following Gopher: <coombs.anu.edu.au/~coombspapers/otherarchives/asian-studies-archives/tibetan-archives/network-inf-sources; type 0, port 70>. For more information, contact <tmciolek@coombs.anu.edu.au>.

20. In some cases, the current trendiness of the Tibet issue in artistic/celebrity circles has led to a tendency by the Western media to treat Tibet as more of an entertainment issue than a political one, focusing on personalities as opposed to conditions in Tibet.

21. There is nothing new in arguing that television, and the media generally, can not be regarded as a mere observer and reporter of events and that they have become an integral part of the reality they report. In a familiar argument, Bennett (1982) has suggested that the media are "definers of social reality," a view which challenges one of the central tenets of Western journalism: that reporters must be objective, neutral and impartial. For a discussion of each side of the debate, see essays by Schudson, Gurevitch, and Lichtenberg in Curran and Gurevitch 1991.

22. Samdup is referring to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the final document adopted by participants at the World Conference on Human Rights.

23. The situation has changed somewhat since the interview in December 1993. The Canada Tibet Committee is currently funding the costs of operating a computer network connection from Delhi to Dharamsala and the costs of a local network that connects Tibetan government and cultural institution offices to the international computer network.

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