**Dalai Lama-Tibet-China: Re-set Buddhist Harmony with Soft Autonomy vs. Cultural Nihilism**

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Meeting the Dalai Lama for the third time, you get a good impression what he really wants from China and for Tibet.

China should re-set its relationship with the Dalai Lama and start a new policy of harmony in Tibet in the interests of its own harmony, stability and progress, not to please the West. Beijing should start a new improved Tibet policy of reconciliation and respect including the protection and promotion of the Tibetan culture within the design of ‘soft autonomy’.

After nine unsuccessful rounds of talks with Beijing, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama should on the other side establish and publish a precise, fresh and convincing *Autonomy and Reconciliation Plan* *for Tibet* integrating a new pragmatic approach, professionalize his negotiation team with top foreign advisors, contain the more radical youth in Tibet who have once already got out of control in the riots of 2008 and persuade them to continue his peaceful Buddhist “Middle Way” for Tibet.

The aim is not independence any more but an acceptable kind of autonomy only for Tibet as agreed in 1951 by the communists with the Tibetans under chairman Mao, thus a re-set of this delicate relationship against cultural nihilism within the People’s Republic of China promoting respect and peace between the Han-Chinese and the Tibetans.

To give up the desire for independence and to focus on concrete talks about improvements with the representatives of the Dalai Lama was a strategy promoted by Premier Wen Jiabao in 2009 and even paramount Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping already in 1979 - until now without positive results.

China has the flexibility to initiate various sets of 'soft autonomy' in several different ways letting a hundred new flowers of real harmony blossom: with or without an agreement with the Dalai Lama, in the larger traditional region of Old Tibet or in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) only.

Beijing’s focus on economic progress is not enough to stabilize Tibet. What is needed is a double strategy of progress and respect to harmonize the delicate relationship and avoid further frustrations and riots.

***New 5th generation leadership needs better policies***

China needs a fresh strategic approach. For a long time the leadership has focused on economic growth only, and it next needs a clever double strategy of growth and domestic harmony, integrating fresh new thinking and public justice into politics, including cutting back the corruption and mismanagement of the too strong local government level.

But behind the stiff curtains in Beijing and within the top committees of the communist party there are astonishingly controversial and open discussions about political options and the way China should reform and best treat other countries, its population and minorities.

One important area of interest is how to treat the two frustrated ethnic groups in Xinjiang (Muslims) and Tibet and to reconcile them with the Han-Chinese. This article intends to address these internal discussions and describe some political options.

I am convinced that a true harmonious peace is possible in Tibet which is not only good for the five million Tibetans but the whole 1.3 bn. strong population of big mother China as well and the Han-Chinese living there.

This had been intended by Chairman Mao for Tibet in 1951 – and he was right – but later the lust for totalitarian power, the neglect of the diverse cultural and religious heritage of China, and the destructive cultural evolution of nihilism led Beijing for too long on the path of disharmony with its ethnic minorities which today continues to frustrate both sides. This – and not the desire for respect of the minorities – still leads to frictions with the central power and threatens stability in the Chinese Empire.

It is in the national interest for Beijing to make a fresh assessment of its policies with regard to the national minorities – which are local majorities - in order to stabilize the country internally.

As a less important side-effect it will also increase China’s prestige and influence globally and give its foreign policy the credibility desperately needed in our globalized world. China’s main challenge in becoming a respected new centre of power is not that it has only one aircraft carrier and less than the US but instead that so far it has no credibility as a front-runner of human ethnic progress and freedom.

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China’s foreign policy is still too static, old communist style influenced, and missing a respected soul. It needs renovation and new direction and it must adapt to the new world which is diverse and multi-polar.

Respect and cultural sensitivity are important elements of a harmonious global order where no majority suppresses any minority. A promotion of codes of tolerance and respect is needed to stabilize our global village (see [*www.codesoftolerance.com*](http://www.codesoftolerance.com/)). This is fully in line with the design of a new global order which China has promoted for years. But a logical strategic approach is still missing with a domestic start first, and not in foreign countries.

The Beijing government faces many problems in the next decades internally and must start to reduce all areas of conflict step by step now – the sooner the better – before it is too late.

Can a policy of *no experiments and no changes* promote Chinese interests better than a continuous reform-process which is not stopped again and again but flows smoothly?

Should *Angst about a Jasmine-revolution* stop any reforms needed anddominate or cool new design and forward looking political management of progress?

Should China’s policy be stiff and exclusive or flexible and inclusive, integrating also the critical ethnic, religious and political elements or just contain and destroy them?

This is the discussion within the communist party now.

China’s economic policies are excellent and this country is also sometimes better than the EU and the US in longer-term planning and implementation. The last 30 years the annual growth rate was 9.6 percent. It lifted 400m people out of poverty in just three decades – a world record and AAA.

According to the Five Year Plan for 2010-2015, it needs a minimum of 7 to 8 percent annual growth to absorb the 23m people who enter the job-market each year. Missing this – President Hu Jintao told German Chancellor Merkel – would start “social destabilization”. Growth at almost any price is the new God of China. Exactly the same amount of growth is eaten up each year by environmental sins and wasted, so Beijing needs a totally new approach to protect nature in the interests of stability as well.

The Chinese save too much money, with almost 60 percent of income saved compared to only 5 percent in the US and 11 percent in the EU in 2010, so consumption has to be stimulated for growth which requires the 1.3bn Chinese to have a positive perception of their future and safety.

It is often forgotten that China’s Communist Party has no ideological legitimacy left but is only respected by people for the high growth rate. What happens if growth is slowed as we see in the US or Europe now?

Gucci, Prada, and Audi and BMW cars are now the new religion for the rich and the poor. Missing is a non-materialistic soul. The Chinese leadership needs to fill this spiritual vacuum with the elements of traditional wisdom from Confucius, Buddha and the Christian beliefs.

Beijing is fixated on fighting any regional autonomy at any price as dangerous “separatism” along with “terrorism” still. Is this wise or frustrating the people?

Are these the lessons learned from the Arabellion?

Or did those autocrats in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia fall so quickly within a few months because they reformed nothing or did too little too late?

Is there a danger of China becoming an empty shell of stability?

Or making the mistakes of the Emperors who thought wrongly that they did not need Western know-how when the British offered cooperation in the 18th century?

We should not transfer our Western thinking onto the Chinese who follow their own world and see it through different glasses and filters, but the logic of the downfall of autocrats is the same all over the world.

China’s leadership is in danger of a new *Mandarin Syndrome*:

-Too much China-centred thinking, and tight administration control as in 1793 during the Lord George Macartney mission, when it missed the opportunity to peacefully adopt diplomatic relations and share essential know-how with England.

-Overrating the power of the state – which in revolutionary times can be overtaken quickly by mass-movements – and

-Under-estimating the need for steady reforms, a balance of power system to avoid its misuse and the desire of the different groups within China for social and legal justice.

There is always a strong group within the leadership who realize these dangers, but they are blocked and repeatedly neutralized by so called conservative rival-groups who halt reforms in order to preserve the old system and the status quo as long as possible.

The task is not to adopt democratic values, human rights and a perfect Westminster democracy over night per se but to design and implement a new durable and credible Chinese concept of stability for a China designed by the communist party.

Like a good cook, China must mix its own spices with elements of freedom, power-control, economic progress and environmental protection.

Without human rights and the integration of the interests of the people and ethnic minorities, this Wok-dish will be not be digestible and will keep China hungry and unstable forever.

***No Separatism but Autonomy only***

In a speech in March 2011 published on the Dalai Lama’s official website ([*www.dalailama.com*](http://www.dalailama.com/)) he said: *“In our efforts to solve the issue of Tibet, we have consistently pursued the mutually beneficial Middle-Way Approach, which seeks genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people within the PRC. In our talks with officials of the Chinese government’s United Front Work Department we have clearly explained in detail the Tibetan people’s hopes and aspirations. The lack of any positive response to our reasonable proposals makes us wonder whether these were fully and accurately conveyed to the higher authorities.”*

On his website the Dalai Lama describes in detail how autonomy should be established:

*“Without seeking independence for Tibet, the Central Tibetan Administration strives for the creation of a political entity comprising the three traditional provinces of Tibet; Such an entity should enjoy a status of genuine national regional autonomy; This autonomy should be governed by the popularly-elected legislature and executive through a democratic process and should have an independent judicial system; As soon as the above status is agreed upon by the Chinese government, Tibet would not seek separation from, and remain within, the People's Republic of China; Until the time Tibet is transformed into a zone of peace and non-violence, the Chinese government can keep a limited number of armed forces in Tibet for its protection; The Central Government of the People's Republic of China has the responsibility for the political aspects of Tibet’s international relations and defence, whereas the Tibetan people should manage all other affairs pertaining to Tibet, such as religion and culture, education, economy, health, ecological and environmental protection; The Chinese government should stop its policy of human rights violations in Tibet and the transfer of Chinese population into Tibetan areas; To resolve the issue of Tibet, His Holiness the Dalai Lama shall take the main responsibility of sincerely pursuing negotiations and reconciliation with the Chinese government.”*

In our first meeting in Buenos Aires in May 2006 the Dalai Lama argued:

*“Tibet does not strive to become independent from China, but rather to receive cultural and domestic autonomy. Foreign and security policy can continue to be represented by Beijing. Despite massive oppression for almost 50 years, more than 90 percent of Tibetans continue to refuse to accept the excessive control from Beijing. Murder, torture and intimidation have had and continue to have no effect. This is why Tibet is unstable-only autonomy can bring about real stability.”*

60 years later China should return to the wise Tibet policy of Chairman Mao:

On May 23, 1951, the Central People’s Government and the local government of Tibet agreed on a 17 point plan to rule the relationship which was forced upon the Tibetans by superior China:

“3. In accordance with the policy towards nationalities laid down in the Common Programme of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the Tibetan people have the *right of exercising national regional autonomy* under the unified leadership of the Central People's Government.

4. The Central Authorities will *not alter the existing political system in Tibet*. The Central Authorities also will not alter the established status, functions and powers of the Dalai Lama. Officials of various ranks shall hold office as usual.......

7. The policy of freedom of religious belief laid down in the Common Programme of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference will be protected. The Central Authorities will not affect any change in the income of the monasteries.”

In the preamble of this agreement the relationship between the Chinese and the Tibetans is precisely described as a harmonious big family of nationalities with guaranteed autonomy:

“In accordance with the Common Programme passed by the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the Central People's Government declared that all nationalities within the boundaries of the People's Republic of China are equal, and that they shall establish unity and mutual aid and oppose imperialism and their own public enemies, so that the People's Republic of China may become one big family of fraternity and cooperation, composed of all its nationalities.

Within this big family of nationalities of the People's Republic of China, *national regional autonomy is to be exercised in areas where national minorities are concentrated, and all national minorities are to have freedom to develop their spoken and written languages and to preserve or reform their customs, habits, and religious beliefs,* and the Central People's Government will assist all national minorities to develop their political, economic, cultural, and educational construction work. Since then, all nationalities within the country, with the exception of those in the areas of Tibet and Taiwan, have gained liberation. Under the unified leadership of the Central People's Government and the direct leadership of the higher levels of People's Governments, *all national minorities have fully enjoyed the right of national equality and have exercised, or are exercising, national regional autonomy.*”

Was Mao wrong or wise?

Although he first disliked this agreement, now the Dalai Lama demands with his Middle-way-approach only what Mao already agreed in this document from 1951, so it should be in line with the Communist Party and the central government as well to come back to this fundamental agreement.

The local government still ignores the fair rules from 1951, and the need for cultural autonomy and identity, instead following a policy of suppression showing too little respect.

The Tibetan culture is linked to nomadic life with 2.25 million people still following this way of life. The Chinese want to re-locate them in ghetto-style-housing blocks. In the next five years 100,000 families living as nomads are to be forced to give up their 1000-year way of life and abandon their cattle to live in new anonymous housing complexes. 50,000 nomad families have been forced into this Han-Chinese life-style in the last few years, losing their traditional homes, life-style, independence and dignity.

Still there are few street signs in both Chinese and Tibetan language and official documents have Chinese as the only official language.

The numbers of monks and nuns are restricted and the monasteries controlled despite the guarantee in the 1982 constitution of the PRC granting freedom of religious belief.

Land is given to Chinese colonists and the focus of the economy is on resource extraction for Chinese companies.

In 2007 the Chinese government issued a report outlining the discovery of a large deposit of zinc, copper, and lead under the Tibetan Plateau estimated at USD 128 bn.

The Qingzang railway links the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) with Qinghai province since 2006.

In January 2010 a national conference on Tibet called for an increase of the Tibetan income to national standards by 2020 and free education for all children.

The annual growth of TAR GDP was 12.3 percent over the last nine years with USD 46bn invested by the central government.

Development is welcomed but not the domination of the Chinese over the traditional culture and life-style.

The Tibetans have become second class citizens and inferior to the Han Chinese in their own country missing real harmony and respect for the majority. This makes them angry and aggressive and caused the riots of 2008 out of sheer frustration.

Just waiting for the Dalai Lama to pass away may be the wrong strategy as more aggressive younger leaders could take over and complicate any settlement.

***The Dalai Lama needs a new Autonomy and Reconciliation Plan for Tibet and a better team***

On the other side the position of the Tibetans and the Dalai Lama are weakened by two factors:

*First:* no clear and short *Autonomy and Reconciliation Plan for Tibet* has been published and promoted by him with precise demands and proposals and outlining the first pragmatic steps forward. His negotiation team has concentrated in the nine rounds on confidence building measures, which lead only to vagueness and produce not even small results.

It must be made clearer which areas should be included in the Tibetan autonomy. The Dalai Lama wants to include “Old Tibet” with all three original provinces: U’sang, Kham and Amdo. But Kham and Amdo are now largely incorporated into the Chinese provinces of Qinghai and Sichuan.

Old Tibet is very large and covers 25 percent of the territory of the PRC now. When talking about Tibet the Chinese politicians mean only the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) established in 1965 which includes less than half of the traditional Tibetan land.

According to a Chinese census in 2000, ethnic Tibetans comprise 92 percent (2.4 million) of the population in TAR. Another one million Tibetans live in the province of Qinghai (23 percent), 455,000 in the province of Sichuan (53 percent), 117,000 in Kunan and 330,000 (51 percent) in Gansu.

In total approx. five million Tibetans live in China with a focus in TAR and Qinghai. So any autonomy must consider this population outside the TAR as well.

The *Autonomy and Reconciliation Plan* for Tibet should start with elements from the 1951 agreement with the Communist Government and integrate the following points as a compromise:

1. In the next five negotiation rounds a pragmatic reconciliation approach and double strategy of economic progress and cultural respect implemented in small steps discussed and agreed between the Chinese and the representatives of the Dalai Lama. Both sides should enter the next rounds with a list of first steps and a time-table. Beijing could show goodwill to improve the cultural identity of the Tibetans. The Dalai Lama should praise the PRC for it and as well for economic progress. Thus trust can be build up in several small steps.

2. Separate standing working-groups to focus on important areas of progress like education, language and culture, religion in more detail.

3. It could even be possible to carve out the issue of political autonomy and which parts of Old Tibet should be included and agree on a ‘soft autonomy’ providing more religious and cultural autonomy all over Old Tibet only. After five years the second round could discuss the more complicated issues. Maybe by then China will have reformed itself and become self-confident enough to give more political rights to local communities.

4. The basis of the status of Tibet and reconciliation with China should be the re-vitalization of the 17 point agreement from May 23, 1951, between the Central People’s Government and the local government of Tibet including:

- The right of national equality and regional autonomy of Tibet.

- The Central Authorities will not alter the established status, functions and powers of the 14th Dalai Lama who is also entitled to pick his successor as a purely religious matter.

- The policy of freedom of religious belief will be protected as well as language, life-style, monasteries, Tibetan Buddhism and culture.

- Tibetan and Chinese as equal official languages for all documents, street-signs, and at schools.

5. No independence for Tibet but a ‘soft autonomy’ in domestic and cultural affairs. There are several benchmarks and best practices to learn from with concrete improvements such as the Accord on South Tyrol by the Republics of Italy and Austria from 1972; the bilateral agreement and treatment of the Danish and the German minorities in the state of Schleswig-Holstein in North Germany or the Sorbian minority in the German state of Saxony. Autonomy can have different faces. It is never separatism but a maximum of respect and cultural diversity avoiding the domination of the central state over the wishes of the local population. Small steps and signs are important and good-will day by day as well. Foreign, security and macro-economic policies will continue to be represented by Beijing.

6. ‘Flexible autonomy’ which can be limited to the Tibet Autonomous Region as the core of Tibet but with all cultural guarantees for all other parts of old Tibet in Qinhai and Sichuan as a territorial compromise. The term ‘autonomy’ could be filled with more or less content and maybe even changed to the term ‘harmonious friendship”. Important is real respect and preservation of the Tibetan culture and religion – including full autonomy of all monasteries and the Dalai Lama as religious leader – in all parts of Old Tibet and concrete reconciliation of the five million Tibetans with the Han-Chinese and the Beijing government. The benchmark in China could be the agreement and successful experience in Hong Kong.

7. Use of peaceful means only and a polite wording in the public.

8. General amnesty for both sides for any previous violations and establishment of a Tibetan Truth and Reconciliation Commission as was very successfully done by Bishop Desmond Tutu after the Apartheid in South Africa and copied by more than 20 countries to promote deeper reconciliation. Release of all prisoners.

9. Establishment of a Permanent Round Table in Lhasa with the local government promoting reconciliation efforts on all levels (see [*www.codesoftolerance.com*](http://www.codesoftolerance.com/) for details for politicians).

10.Annual Progress Report Tibet published by the Round Table to be presented to Beijing. Before such an agreement is reached the exiled government of Tibet should publish an annual Progress Report Tibet including positive and negative developments.

The implementation of such an original best practice Reconciliation Plan for Tibet from 2015 to 2020 – based on Mao’s principles from 1951 and the wisdom of Deng Xiaoping from 1979 – will be one important corner-stone of a fresh stabilization-policy of the 5th leadership generation with several positive effects within China and outside.

Stability and progress of the Chinese society by integration and not domination is the golden path of the future.

Only such a policy of true harmony and consensus fits into the 3,000 year-old Chinese wisdom and native traditions of Confucius and Buddha – and our global village. There rests truth, justice, peace and prosperity for China and its 1.3bn people. Any true China-loving nationalist must follow that path of the Chinese souls as well.

China will learn that it is in its own interests not only to preserve Mother Nature such as the few famous Panda bears that are now left but also its minorities with their cultural heritage as a bonus for the empire and internal and external harmony.

Harmony will prevail and cultural nihilism decline as the last element remaining from the destructive period of the Cultural Revolution.