

Resolving Asymmetric Stalemate: the case of the Tibet Question

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A situation of asymmetric stalemate exists when neither side can force a unilateral resolution of a conflict even though one side is significantly stronger than the other. Although a standoff can persist indefinitely, the only path to resolution of conflict is negotiation. Even though the conflict between China and the Dalai Lama regarding Tibetan autonomy is not one between sovereign states, it fits the pattern of asymmetric stalemate. Current discussions between China and the Dalai Lama illustrate the importance of recognition of autonomy on the part of the stronger side and of deference on the part of the weaker side in resolving asymmetric stalemate.

Irreconcilable differences often mark the end of marriages and of peace between nations. But in international relations permanent separation is often not feasible (the parties cannot move away from one another), and war can be inconclusive even when one side is much stronger than the other. In cases of stalemate, where neither side is able to resolve the conflict through coercion and neither benefits from continuing hostility, frustration can lead to negotiations. Since neither side can simply overcome the other, negotiations to end stalemate can only be successful if their object is the management of differences rather than their final solution.¹

Even though the parties are negotiating the end of stalemate from positions of hostility and mistrust, their mutual experience with the costs of conflict and the frustration of their war aims provides a common interest. In situations of asymmetric stalemate, the stronger side typically finds that it cannot achieve its limited aims with the resources that it is willing to commit, while the weaker side suffers more acutely but cannot surrender because its autonomy and identity are at risk. Successful negotiation of an asymmetric stalemate requires that the stronger side is not put at risk by the consequences of disengagement, and that the weaker side is assured that its basic autonomy is respected. Although such negotiations are rarely swift and easy, the frustration of hostility drives them on, and bitter experience of the futility of stalemate underwrites the stability of the ensuing normalization.

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1. For a more extensive analysis of asymmetric stalemate, see Brantly Womack, *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ch. 4.

The standoff between the Dalai Lama's exile government located at Dharamsala, India and the government of the People's Republic of China is not, strictly speaking, a case of international relations, since no state, including the Dalai Lama's host state of India, recognizes his government in exile as the legitimate government of Tibet, and no state claims that Tibet is, or should be, an independent state separate from China. Moreover, the Dalai Lama himself does not claim or demand that Tibet is an independent state, but rather asks for cultural autonomy for ethnic Tibetans within China and his own return to Tibet. The Dalai Lama has tried and failed to force China's hand through international pressure. On the other side, however, China is not in a position to control or to force the Dalai Lama's compliance despite its undisputed territorial sovereignty.

Meanwhile, the continuing differences between the government of China and the religious leader of Tibetan Buddhism create a security cloud that hangs over relations between the central government and ethnic Tibetans in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and in neighboring areas in other provinces. Any respect for the Dalai Lama or unrest in Tibet is interpreted as separatism. Moreover, the unresolved tension regarding the Dalai Lama has strong though indirect effects on many of China's other international relations. Hence, the current situation is a stalemate, it is certainly asymmetric, and as of 2006 discussions are ongoing. The task of this paper is to analyze the structure and dynamics of this stalemate, and to consider the prospect of normalization.

The current anomalous situation regarding Tibet has a correspondingly anomalous history. The 'Tibet Question', as the long-running contradiction between Tibetan autonomy and Chinese sovereignty is often called by Western diplomats and scholars, has seen a series of asymmetric stalemates, resolutions, and renewed conflicts.² In the past 100 years the relationship between the national government of China and the Tibetan leadership headed and symbolized by the Dalai Lama has moved from a relatively stable but distant and complex relationship under the last Chinese dynasty, through de facto autonomy in 1911–1949, to the major attempt at negotiated normalcy in 1950–1957. With the uprising and subsequent departure of the Dalai Lama and 80,000 followers in March 1959, followed by the harshness of the Cultural Revolution within Tibet, the current standoff was created between China as the sovereign power in Tibet and the Dalai Lama as the exiled voice of the Tibetan people. To the present time a situation has existed in which the national government of China has been in undisputed control of all of Tibetan territory, but the government in exile of the Dalai Lama has had continuing claims to international sympathy and to the private loyalty of many Tibetans who remained in Tibet.

Since 1979 sporadic efforts have been made toward reconciliation, and they have become increasingly coordinated and promising since 2001. Although the nature of stalemate makes difficult the prediction of breakthroughs, it is possible that the present series of discussions will see a major change in the relationship between

2. Melvyn Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). See also Melvyn Goldstein, Dawei Sherap and William Siebenschuh, *A Tibetan Revolutionary: The Political Life and Times of Bapa Phüntso Wangye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Bapa Phüntso Wangye, also known as Phünwang, was a founding member of the Tibetan Communist Party.

China and the Dalai Lama. It is all the more useful and necessary, therefore, to consider carefully the conditions and processes of asymmetric normalization.

This essay will begin with an account of the current discussions, and then consider the situation from the perspective of asymmetric stalemate. Lastly, it will speculate on the feasibility of current negotiations.

1. Current discussions between China and the Dalai Lama

Despite the general atmosphere of rigid and mutual hostility between China and the exile government of the Dalai Lama since 1959, there have been important efforts by both sides toward reconciliation. Fundamental improvement of the situation of Tibet—including possible reconciliation with the Dalai Lama—has been an important theme of Chinese politics in the reform era. The first Symposium on Work in Tibet [第一次西藏工作座谈会] was held in March 1980, and Hu Yaobang in particular was active in transforming policy in Tibet and in pursuing contact with the Dalai Lama.³ For his part, the Dalai Lama sent representatives to China and ceased to call for Tibetan independence. However, to make a long story short, optimism concerning reconciliation was founded on unrealistic assumptions by each side concerning the flexibility of the other. China was willing to permit the Dalai Lama to return to a ceremonial role in Beijing, much like that occupied by the Panchen Lama. The Dalai Lama, however, considered his return to imply at a minimum the restoration of local governmental autonomy under his authority as it had existed in the 1950s. It might be said that China was willing to forget the 1950s, while the Dalai Lama was willing to forget the 1960s and 1970s.

Although contacts under these circumstances proved disillusioning and frustrating, neither side abandoned in principle the idea of reconciliation. However, the activities of each side in the 1980s and 1990s added to the differences between the sides. The Dalai Lama pursued a vigorous worldwide campaign to put pressure on China. Meanwhile, the Chinese central government invested heavily in Tibet's economic development, so that the material reality of Tibet moved further away from the Tibet that the Dalai Lama had left 40 years earlier. In the late 1990s it was reasonable to assume, as Melvyn Goldstein did in his 1997 work, that the prospects of reconciliation were dim indeed, and that the most likely new development would be desperate, sporadic terrorism on the part of Tibetans.⁴ While both sides would continue to proclaim their willingness to negotiate, in fact each would view the other as a competitor and would not seek feasible compromises.

Contrary to such expectations, progress has been made in the past four years in establishing contact between China and the Dalai Lama and in pursuing a negotiated solution to the Tibetan Question. Thus far no threshold has been crossed, but active

3. The best account of interactions from 1979 to 1996 is Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon*, though Phünwang's personal account in Goldstein *et al.*, *A Tibetan Revolutionary*, is invaluable. A conservative official account of the development of China's Tibet policy is available in Che Minghui 车明怀, 'Dang zai Xizang shizhong baochi xianjianxing de lishi sikao 党在西藏始终保持先进性的历史思考' ['Reflections on the Party's history of perseverance in progressivism in Tibet from beginning to end'], *Xizang Ribao*, (6 April 2005). Che Minghui is head of the Party history office for the Tibet Autonomous Region.

4. Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon*, pp. 100–131.

negotiations imply that on both sides there are participants who consider a negotiated solution possible.

On the side of China, the Fourth Symposium on Work in Tibet [第四次西藏工作座谈会] was held in June 2001. Although the main emphasis of the symposium was on continued economic modernization, there was also new interest in reopening contact with the Dalai Lama. In January 2002 arrangements were made to reopen official contact, and from 2002 to 2006 a total of five meetings have taken place, four of them in China. The visits have not resulted in joint statements or in public reports from the Chinese side. Nor were there any public indications of a planned series or of the pace of future meetings. Indeed, despite the hospitable reception of the Tibetan delegation, the Foreign Ministry treated the visits as private rather than official. Of course, in any case the status of the delegation would not fit normal categories. From the Chinese perspective, the Dalai Lama represents an alienated domestic group, neither a government nor a foreign organization. Therefore meetings with the United Front Department were the highest appropriate level of reception for the purposes of exchanging views.

Meanwhile, the Dalai Lama had designated Lodi Gyaltsen Gyari (Gyari Rinpoche) his special envoy in dealing with China.⁵ Lodi Gyari had participated in the previous official delegations to China and also serves as the Dalai Lama's representative to North America. Although the meetings are not highlighted by exiled Tibetan organizations, they are publicly discussed and Lodi Gyari has issued a brief public report after each one. His first comprehensive position statement was given at the Brookings Institution on 14 November 2006.⁶ The first of five discussions occurred in China from 9 to 27 September 2002, and marked the first official contact since 1984. Besides discussions in Beijing, the trip included Shanghai, Chengdu, Lhasa and other areas in Tibet. The second visit lasted from 25 May to 8 June 2003, during the latter stages of the SARS epidemic. Despite the epidemic, the delegation visited Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and an ethnic Tibetan part of Yunnan.

The third visit, 12 to 29 September 2004, coincided with the 4th Plenum of the 16th Central Committee, the landmark meeting at which Jiang Zemin resigned his position on the Central Military Commission and the Central Committee issued 'Decision on the Enhancement of the Party's Governance Capability', the programmatic document for Hu Jintao's political leadership.⁷ The third visit included a meeting between Lodi Gyari and the newly appointed Head of the United Front Work Department of the Communist Party of China, Minister Liu Yandong 刘延东, who is also Vice Chairperson of the Tenth National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (2004). According to Lodi Gyari's public report on 13 October, the meeting was 'so far the most extensive and serious exchange of views on

5. Lodi Gyari was so designated in May 1988. For the most detailed analysis of recent interactions from an exile perspective, see Tashi Rabgey and Tseten Wangchuk Sharlho, *Sino-Tibetan Dialogue in the Post-Mao Era: Lessons and Prospects*, Policy Studies no. 12. (Washington: East-West Center, 2004).

6. Lodi Gyari, 'Seeking unity through equality: the current status of discussions between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the government of the People's Republic of China', text of remarks delivered at the Brookings Institution, Washington, 14 November 2006.

7. The Resolution is summarized at length in *People's Daily Online*, (26 September 2004). The original is available from *Xinhua Network*, (19 September 2004).

matters relating to Tibet'. Nevertheless, the substantive result was that 'there are major differences on a number of issues, including some fundamental ones'.⁸

The fourth meeting took place on 30 June and 1 July 2005 at the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Berne, Switzerland. The Chinese delegation was led by the deputy head of the United Front Department, Zhu Weiqun 朱維群. The report was positive in general, and its new themes were the acceptance of the talks as an 'established practice' and unspecified proposals from the side of the Dalai Lama for concrete measures to build confidence and to show progress.

The report from the fifth meeting, 15–23 February 2006, was not as optimistic in its tone as in 2004. Although it included a day-long discussion with Zhu Weiqun, not only did 'fundamental differences' remain, but Lodi Gyari noted 'a major difference even in the approach in addressing the issue'. Judging from subsequent Chinese commentary, and Lodi Gyari's later talk at Brookings, the key difference highlighted by the meeting was the desire on the part of the Dalai Lama to merge all ethnic Tibetan areas into the TAR.⁹ The most positive aspect of the meeting was that both sides remained committed to continuing dialog.¹⁰ The Dalai Lama's 2006 talk on the anniversary of the March uprising reflected continuing commitment to dialog despite increasing frustration.¹¹ The Dalai Lama suggested that he visit China as a private pilgrim, and suggested that China give some sign of its sincerity. In the meantime the Dalai Lama was not invited to the World Buddhist Conference held in Hangzhou in April. It is clear, however, that even such a visit would not be the solution to the Tibet Question, but rather the beginning of a more positive but still long-term stage in the negotiations.

Since the fifth meeting both sides have reiterated their willingness to continue the process, but the frustration of each side is also apparent. For the Dalai Lama's part, the meetings have put him in a difficult situation with the more anti-China elements of the exile community and their supporters, and the lack of any tangible result reinforces their criticisms.

For China's part, the Dalai Lama's commitment to Tibet as part of China remains suspect. The initial conditions for direct negotiations with the Dalai Lama were that he declare that both Tibet and Taiwan were inalienable parts of China. However, at the fifth meeting apparently Lodi Gyari raised the demand that the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) be expanded to include all ethnic Tibetans. Not only would such a demand be impossible for China to accept for both practical reasons and matters of principle, but it raises suspicions that the Dalai Lama is insincere regarding reconciliation and remains committed to Tibetan separatism. The current boundaries of the TAR correspond to the boundaries of the area administered by the Dalai Lama's local government before 1959, and to the historic administrative boundaries of Tibet before 1950. If the TAR were expanded to include all ethnic Tibetan areas in China it would occupy a quarter of China's territory, and it would be the only

8. 'Third visit of Tibetan envoys tests Beijing's intentions', *Tibet Press Watch* 12(4), (September–October 2004), pp. 1, 8.

9. 'On the "middle way" of the Dalai Lama', *People's Daily Online*, (26 July 2006).

10. 'Central government opens door to communicate with Dalai Lama', *People's Daily Online*, (15 March 2006).

11. 'Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama for March 10th anniversary for the 47th anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day', available at: http://www.tibet.ca/en/wtnarchive/2006/3/10_1.html.

autonomous region reconstituted on the basis of ethnic uniformity.¹² Moreover, there are traditional ethnic Tibetan areas in Bhutan, Sikkim, and Nepal that were separated from Tibet by British imperialism, so even 'greater Tibet'¹³ would not include all Tibetans. Hence concerns emerge about whether the Dalai Lama is really serious about returning to Tibet as it is now, and whether the demand for administrative transformation goes beyond the boundaries of cultural and religious leadership.

With the need for signs of progress on the Dalai Lama's side and China's renewed doubts about the possibility of satisfactory negotiations, an impasse within the framework of dialogue has been reached. The posture of dialogue remains firm, but the next steps will be more difficult. Since China does recognize the Dalai Lama as a religious leader, it could treat him as a religious leader while still criticizing separatism. The current policy of shunning the Dalai Lama because of suspicions of separatism has been ineffective and even embarrassing. The Dalai Lama's offer of visiting China as a pilgrim could provide China with an opportunity to change the current tone of the discussion. For his part, the Dalai Lama should know that the boundaries of the Tibet Autonomous Region are not going to be changed. Ultimately reconciliation will involve a retreat from the demand for a 'greater Tibet' and an acceptance of assurances regarding cultural and religious autonomy without political reorganization. In all probability progress in these two difficult areas will have to be interdependent.

2. The current situation of asymmetric stalemate from the Chinese perspective

The key element of asymmetric analysis is the difference in perspective between the two sides created by differences in capacities. There is a world of difference between the significance of the Dalai Lama for China and the significance of China for the Dalai Lama. For that matter, there is yet another world of difference between each party and third parties, such as the United States. Each side can watch the other with intense scrutiny, not missing a single important fact or gesture, but inevitably there will be systemic misinterpretation of the other side if the difference in context is not appreciated.

The best evidence of the importance of perspective can be drawn from an examination of the basic claim of each side. China's claim that Tibet is part of China is often taken by the other side as an assertion that is both threatening and falsifiable. The Dalai Lama's argument for Tibetan autonomy is taken by China as a separatist challenge to its authority in Tibet and an anti-China influence in international relations. Both of these interpretations are more a measure of the felt impact of the other's claim on one's own interests rather than an analysis of the significance of the claims in themselves. We will consider the Tibet Question first from the Chinese perspective in this section and from the Dalai Lama's perspective in the next.

12. There are eight Tibetan autonomous prefectures, two mixed autonomous prefectures, and two Tibetan autonomous counties outside the TAR.

13. It should be noted that Lodi Gyari does not use the term 'greater Tibet'. It is used here as a convenient designation for an administrative unit including all ethnic Tibetan areas in China in contrast to the current boundaries of the TAR.

For China, it is a fact that Tibet is part of China, and this fact shapes both national and local realities. Tibet is similar to other parts of China in that it deserves to be included in national progress. If modernization is good for the rest of China then it must be good for Tibet as well. Because Tibet is China's most isolated province and also one of its least developed, special attention and resources must be devoted to its development, and they have been. From 1951 to 1958 the central government provided 91% of the revenue of the Dalai Lama's local government.¹⁴ During the first 40 years of the Tibet Autonomous Region, from 1965 to 2005, the Center contributed almost 100 billion RMB to local finance,¹⁵ and from 1952 to 1989 the annual increase in subsidy averaged 14%.¹⁶ Perhaps more importantly, more than 100,000 cadres and specialists have been transferred from other provinces to work in Tibet. From 1977 to 1988, almost 3,000 teachers and 2,600 medical personnel were transferred to Tibet.¹⁷ Tibetan students have been accepted on scholarships by higher education institutions in 21 provinces on the condition that they return to Tibet to work for at least three years.

These policies have had dramatic effects in Tibet. Life expectancy has increased from 35.5 years to 67 years, in part because infant mortality has dropped from 43% to 3.1%.¹⁸ From 1965 to 1982 the average height for 17-year-olds increased by eight centimeters for men and women, and average weight increased by 4.5 kilograms for men and 3.0 kilograms for women.¹⁹ The percentage of children in school rose from less than 2% in 1951 to 55% in 1990.²⁰ In 2002 Tibet's GDP per capita ranked 23rd among China's 31 provinces, but in the five years from 1997 to 2002 it grew by 210%, the fastest of all provinces. For each of the three years 2001–2003 its GDP growth has been more than 12%.²¹ The planned opening of the first railroad to Tibet in 2006 will open a new era in the integration of Tibet with the rest of China.

However, without questioning the value of modernization and material progress for Tibet, the incorporation of Tibet into China's general plan of economic development poses special problems. The physical and social environments of Tibet are unique, and cultural differences between Tibet and the rest of China are great. Moreover, the abrupt and aggressive attempt from 1959 to 1979 to incorporate Tibet into national patterns has created a deep sense of alienation. The increased infrastructural investment and market forces of the reform era tend to increase the polarization of ethnic Tibetans and Han Chinese in Tibet even as general conditions

14. Qun Jue 群觉, Shen Kaiyun 沈开运, Che Minghuai 车明怀, eds, *Zhongguo Xizang Xiandaihua Fazhan Daolu Yanjiu* 中国西藏现代化发展道路研究 [Research on the Path of Modern Development for Chinese Tibet] (Lhasa: Xizang Renmin Chubanshe, 1996), p. 15.

15. Jia Qinglin 贾庆林, 'Zai Xizang Zizhiqu Chengli 40 Zhounian Zingzhu Dahui shang de Jianghua' 在西藏自治区成立 40 周年庆祝大会上的讲话 ['Talk at the 40th anniversary celebration of the Tibet Autonomous Region'], *Xinhua*, (1 September 2005).

16. *Xizang Xiandaihua*, p. 22.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 89–90.

18. *White Paper: Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet* (Beijing: Information Office of China's State Council, 24 May 2004).

19. *Xizang Xiandaihua*, p. 22.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

21. Calculated from *Zhongguo Tongji Nianjian* 中国统计年鉴 1998, 2003, 2004 [China Statistical Yearbook 1998, 2003, 2004] (Beijing: China Statistics Press, 1999, 2004, 2005).

improve. To give one telling example, the number of adult illiterates in Tibet increased from 1982 to 1990 even as the number of children in school went up.²²

The harshness of Tibet's physical environment will restrict immigration to (relatively) low-lying and urban areas and to construction and extraction projects such as roads and mines. Tibet's high illiteracy rate and undeveloped higher educational system will strengthen the tendency to bring in outsiders for modern jobs, accentuating the disparity between the indigenous population and immigrants. In 2004 Tibet had 2,100 higher education graduates, in contrast to the situation of the city of Chengdu, where foreign investment can utilize the 40,000 graduates of 29 local universities.²³ Even the diversification and commercialization of agriculture around urban areas tends to be the product of Han immigrants rather than of ethnic Tibetans.²⁴ Ironically, the sensitivity of the problem of immigration into Tibet is demonstrated by the suppression of relevant statistics. In the *China Statistical Yearbook 2004*, Tibet is the only province to claim that it has no residents from elsewhere.²⁵

But ethnic Tibetans are unlikely to suffer the fate of the American Indians in the United States—a tiny fraction of the population isolated in a land that once was theirs. Rather, the tendency of market forces and government investment in the economy will be to create a bifurcated population: an urban situation, especially in Lhasa, dominated by immigrants, and a broad rural hinterland of ethnic Tibetans that remains agricultural and pastoral.²⁶ Even without immigration, it is estimated that the ethnic Tibetan population of the TAR would double by 2034, with most of the increase in rural areas.²⁷ It is much to the interest of both the TAR and of China as a whole to create a more balanced society and a more integrated pattern of development, but that will require greater sensitivity to the special needs of Tibetans in the modernization process. Without a pattern of socially sustainable development based on the peculiar characteristics of Tibet, modernization is likely to be self-limiting and to lead to societal and political tensions.

The dilemma of ethnic autonomy and the transformative effects of modernization are not unique to Tibet, though perhaps they are felt most acutely in Tibet and Xinjiang. Happily, the challenge is acknowledged by the central leadership. Especially the commitment of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao to 'scientific development' provides a general policy rubric for addressing this problem.²⁸ As the 2005 White Paper on Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities puts it,

Acting in line with the actual conditions of China, the Chinese government will adhere to the scientific concept of human-oriented, all-round, coordinated, sustainable development, further explore and strengthen specific forms of implementation of the

22. Because of population increase, the percentage of illiterates declined. See *Xizang Xiandaihua*, p. 241.

23. Jean Kumagai and Marlowe Hood, 'China's tech revolution', *IEEE Spectrum*, (6 July 2005).

24. Emily T. Yeh, *Taming the Tibetan Landscape: Chinese Development and the Transformation of Agriculture*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2003.

25. *Zhongguo Tongji Nianjian 2004* [China Statistical Yearbook 2004] (Beijing: China Statistics Press, 2005), pp. 102–103.

26. I draw this conclusion from Zhang Tianlu, *Population Development in Tibet and Related Issues* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1997).

27. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

28. See Joseph Fewsmith, 'Promoting the scientific development concept', *China Leadership Monitor* no. 11, (Summer 2004), available at: <http://www.chinaleadershipmonitor.org/20043/jf.html>.

system of regional ethnic autonomy, improve the supporting laws and regulations for the Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy, continuously strengthen the material basis for implementation of the system of regional ethnic autonomy, and promote the all-round economic and social development of ethnic minorities and their areas.²⁹

Because of the diversity of local conditions, this commitment cannot simply be implemented unilaterally by the Center. The White Paper points out that organs of self-government in autonomous areas may ‘rationally adjust the relations of production or economic structure of the said areas’, and are obligated to ‘protect and improve the local environment, and prevent and deal with pollution and other public hazards’.³⁰ Clearly these responsibilities require that the ‘autonomy’ of minority regions is not restricted to a passive preservation of traditional culture, but rather should be an active and locally responsible interaction with central policy.

The fundamental problem for Tibet as part of China that is created by the continued exile of the Dalai Lama is that it adds a security dimension that complicates the whole fabric of center–local relations. China’s official view of the Dalai Lama is that he is ‘a politician in exile disguised as a religious figure, and engages in separatist activities against China’.³¹ Foreign receptivity and support for the Dalai Lama leads to frequent and usually ineffective protests from China. More importantly, within Tibet the Dalai Lama is for many people a symbol of Tibetan identity and, indirectly, of the alienation between ethnic Tibetans and Han Chinese. If the Dalai Lama is considered a separatist, then allegiance to and even respect for the Dalai Lama can be viewed as illegal support for separatism. Given the prestige of the Dalai Lama as the major figure of Tibetan Buddhism, any government efforts to punish support for the Dalai Lama, or even to demean him as a Tibetan leader, are likely to be counterproductive. Given the continuing tensions that can be expected in the modernization process, support for the Dalai Lama is likely to remain a live issue in Tibet.

There are practical domestic consequences to a chronic security issue in Tibet. First, suppression is a two-edged sword. Demonstrations may be prevented and separatists jailed, but others may be alienated who otherwise might be indifferent. China certainly has the resources for suppression, but no society can protect itself completely from extremists. Second, Tibet’s external relations are limited by the security issue. Tourism is one of Tibet’s most attractive resources, and it is greatly constrained by security issues. At present foreign individuals require special documents beyond the normal visa to enter Tibet, and then further permissions to go to border regions. Moreover, direct international traffic into Tibet is restricted because of security concerns. Tourism is the chief modern resource that would support Tibetan cultural and religious institutions as well as modern infrastructure, so it could be particularly important as a bridge in socially sustainable development. Also, trade with Nepal and India is restricted by heightened security concerns. In 2004 two-thirds of Tibet’s exports were still handled in small-scale border trade.³²

29. Information Office of the State Council, ‘Regional autonomy for ethnic minorities’, *Xinhua*, (28 February 2005).

30. *Ibid.*

31. ‘China opposes Dalai Lama’s political activities: FM spokesman’, *People’s Daily Online*, (14 June 2005).

32. ‘2004年西藏自治区国民经济和社会发展统计公报’ [‘2004 Statistical report of the TAR on economic and social development’]. 西藏自治区统计局 [TAR Statistical Bureau], (31 March 2005).

Besides the domestic consequences of the stalemate with the Dalai Lama there are international effects that are less tangible but are nevertheless important. First, India and the United States are the two countries most directly involved with the Dalai Lama, and China's relations with both would be vastly improved if the stalemate were resolved. In both countries, and elsewhere as well, China's hostility toward the Dalai Lama has become a bulwark of negative public opinion regarding China. Second, reconciliation with the Dalai Lama would certainly have a positive impact on cross-Strait relations with Taiwan. The chief concern of many Taiwanese regarding peaceful reunification is the fear that China would not respect Taiwan's autonomy. If the Dalai Lama returned to China, it would demonstrate China's sincerity in respecting diversity within China. Third, international tensions aggravated by religious differences have unfortunately become characteristic of the new millennium. If China managed reconciliation with the Dalai Lama, it would be an example of competent big-power diplomacy in this area.

To sum up the perspective presented here, for China reconciliation with the Dalai Lama would be a major, positive breakthrough for both domestic and foreign policy reasons. China's central problem in Tibet is the management of socially sustainable modernization, but this will require in any case special attention to the interests and needs of ethnic Tibetans. It is much more difficult to develop appropriate policies and encourage cooperation under the security cloud created by concerns about separatism. Hence China's policy is to continue to oppose separatism but also to encourage discussions with the Dalai Lama that might make a breakthrough possible. However, there is no urgency for a breakthrough and there are doubts about the Dalai Lama's sincerity that have been reawakened by the discussion of 'greater Tibet'.

3. The current situation from the exile perspective

Even in normal asymmetric relationships the weaker side is more exposed to risks and opportunities, and therefore experiences the relationship more acutely. In the case of a hostile asymmetric relationship the weaker side is often in a situation of mortal threat in which its identity or even continued existence is at risk. In an asymmetric stalemate the weaker side may become habituated to the conflict, but is likely to remain more aware of the cost of hostility and to be more sensitive to the possibility of normalization. This is certainly the case for the Dalai Lama in his relations with China.

The Dalai Lama has two identities to defend that for most of his exile have overlapped, but now are pulling apart. On the one hand, he represents the cultural and religious identity of Tibet; on the other, he leads the tens of thousands of Tibetans who followed him into exile as well as their sympathizers throughout the world. His claim to general legitimacy rests on the former identity; his base of support derives from the latter. As long as China is perceived as irrevocably hostile to Tibet's interests, then both identities require opposition to China; but if a feasible possibility is perceived to negotiate with China for a better fate for Tibet, then tension develops between the larger Tibetan identity and the smaller exile identity. As the spiritual head of Tibet, the Dalai Lama is obliged to seek the best outcome for Tibetans in general, most of whom are in China. As an exile leader, however, he represents

a group whose special identity as exiles is founded on a mutual rejection between themselves and China, and whose external support and sympathy is also related to an antipathy for China.

The experience of the exile community is directly related to the demand for a 'greater Tibet'. Many of the exiles came from areas outside the TAR, and like other ethnic groups in China they were not protected from land reform or from attacks on local leaders during the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957.³³ Hence they feel that any arrangements that affect only the TAR would leave the other Tibetans in China at risk. Less directly but perhaps more importantly, the exile community itself is the most concentrated trans-regional group of Tibetans anywhere. Quite the opposite of the media-based communities described in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, the Tibetan exiles in Daramsala have direct, face-to-face experience with a trans-regional and cross-stratum community that was impossible in Tibet itself, but has become the basis for their projected aspirations. Living in a microcosm of 'greater Tibet', and united by a feeling of victimization by China, it is hard to accept a more limited outcome for the sake of reconciliation.

The Dalai Lama's interest in ending the stalemate with China was stimulated by the contacts in the 1980s and renewed by recent activities, but it takes on new urgency with the accelerating pace of change in Tibet and with his own advancing age. Economic modernization certainly confronts Tibet with challenges to its autonomy, but they are quite different challenges from those of 1959. Unless modernity is rejected out of hand, which is not the Dalai Lama's position, then his leadership must be a leadership from within the stream of current changes. As an exile, the Dalai Lama faces a problem of increasing irrelevance, not because Tibet's problems have been solved, but because they have shifted.

The second problem of the Dalai Lama's age is not simply a question of personal mortality creating a sense of urgency. Given the structure of traditional Tibetan religious leadership, not only is the Dalai Lama the key figure of authority, but, because of the cycle of rebirths, there is necessarily a gap between the rule of one Dalai Lama and the next. The current 14th Dalai Lama is a person of tremendous personal charisma and authority whose loss would be a major blow to any movement, and his death will be followed by a few years of searching for the next Dalai Lama and a period of regency until the successor is ready to rule. Thus there will be a long period of provisional leadership even without the quite real possibility of disputed claimants for the title of 15th Dalai Lama. Thus the option of negotiating an end to exile is open only under the present Dalai Lama.

The Dalai Lama faces a dilemma. On the one hand, his situation of exile leadership, his international support, and his image since 1959 is premised on a rejection of the legitimacy of China's actions in Tibet. The exile attitude toward China is not simply that of an outsider, but that of an excluded outsider. On the other hand, the millions of ethnic Tibetans in China who respect the Dalai Lama as a religious authority have been part of the People's Republic of China for over 50 years, and part of China's reform era for the past 25 years. The pace of modernization

33. Nationwide, 5,000 minority cadres were labeled 'Rightists' because of localism and other offenses. He Longqun 何龙群, *Gongchandang Minzu Zhengce Shi Lun 中国共产党民族政策史论 [On the History of the CPC's Minority Policy]* (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 2005), p. 202.

in Tibet will increase markedly when the railroad connecting Lhasa to Qinghai becomes fully operational in 2007. The Dalai Lama's responsibilities to Tibet are to Tibet as it is now, not to Tibet as it was when he left.

4. The diplomacy of autonomy and deference

Asymmetry affects not only the perspectives of the actors, but also the character of effective diplomacy. Because each side approaches the relationship from a different perspective, the means of getting the other's attention and satisfying the other's concerns are different. The weaker side is anxious about its autonomy, and so the diplomacy of the stronger side is most effective if it suggests respect for autonomy. The stronger side is concerned that the weaker side act in accordance with the real disparity of power between them. Therefore deference shown by the weaker side is most important to the stronger one.

In the case of such disparate and hostile parties as China and the Dalai Lama, it is hardly surprising that both sides were slow to recognize the situation of stalemate, and that major diplomatic mistakes were made by both sides. However, in the current series of meetings the diplomacy has been more appropriate.

The Dalai Lama's success in raising his international profile and in exerting pressure on China did demonstrate that he was beyond the control of Chinese rewards and punishments. Moreover, it added an international dimension to the costs of stalemate for China. However, his efforts also made clear that no foreign government would put its relationship with China at risk by recognizing the Tibetan government in exile. After the Lhasa demonstrations of 1988–1989 China controlled the security situation within the TAR and began a new stage of Tibetan modernization. Most importantly, the activities of the Dalai Lama were interpreted as signs of insincerity and of an abiding commitment to separatism. Thus the international campaign of 1987–2002 might be said to have strengthened the profile of the Dalai Lama as an exile leader, but at the cost of his credibility as a leader of Tibet.

In the current series of visits beginning in September 2002, the Dalai Lama's diplomacy has been far more careful and deferential. First, Special Envoy Lodi Gyari's public reports on the visits have been brief but optimistic. There has been no attempt, direct or indirect, to utilize the visits for an anti-China polemic. Indeed, after the first visit the Prime Minister of the exile government, Samdhong Rinpoche, called on all Tibetans and Tibet supporters to refrain from public protest during Jiang Zemin's impending visit to the US and Mexico.³⁴ Although the Dalai Lama has not been completely successful in restraining attempts to embarrass Chinese diplomats overseas, it is clear that the sporadic outbreaks are local rather than planned by Dharamsala.

Second, the Dalai Lama has been more explicit about his acknowledgement of China's sovereignty over Tibet. On 26 January 2005, he said to Lawrence Brahm, 'We are willing to be part of the People's Republic of China, to have the PRC govern and guarantee to preserve our Tibetan culture, spirituality, and environment'.³⁵

34. See Tashi Rabgey and Tseten Wangchuk Sharlho, *Sino-Tibetan Dialogue in the Post-Mao Era*.

35. Lawrence Brahm, *South China Morning Post*, (14 March 2005).

Although this goes further than the Dalai Lama's public pronouncements, the following passage from his 2005 Statement on the Forty-Sixth Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day clearly signals a departure from the demands of the 1988 Strasbourg Declaration:

My involvement in the affairs of Tibet is not for the purpose of claiming certain personal rights or political position for myself nor attempting to stake claims for the Tibetan administration in exile. In 1992 in a formal announcement I stated clearly that when we return to Tibet with a certain degree of freedom I will not hold any office in the Tibetan government or any other political position and that the present Tibetan administration in exile will be dissolved. Moreover, the Tibetans working in Tibet should carry on the main responsibility of administering Tibet.³⁶

It is clear from this passage that the Dalai Lama is not demanding a new form of government, or for the restoration of the pre-1959 local government. He appears to accept the structural framework of autonomous regions, and implicitly accepts the political leadership of the Communist Party of China. However, the expansion of the current administrative structure of the TAR is a major political demand, and it is unlikely to be successful. Nevertheless, the Dalai Lama's general response to the current interactions with China have been deferential rather than confrontational.

Third, the Dalai Lama has accepted in principle China's commitment to the modernization of Tibet. While some of the Dalai Lama's supporters are suspicious of any material change in Tibet, the Dalai Lama himself sees material progress as an important goal. His 10 March Statement of 2005 begins with the following statement: 'During these more than four decades great changes have taken place in Tibet. There has been a great deal of economic progress along with development in infrastructure. The Golmud–Lhasa railway link that is being built is a case in point'.³⁷ This positive reference to the railway is crucial for reconciliation since the government's commitment to the railway is irreversible. If the Dalai Lama had rejected the railroad, then the government could reasonably anticipate that he would oppose other plans for economic development as well.

The only formally identified major point of difference between the Dalai Lama and China in the negotiations before 2006 was the demand by China that the Dalai Lama declare that Taiwan as well as Tibet is an inalienable part of China. This declaration would be similar to declarations required of foreign governments making joint statements with China, but the Dalai Lama feels that the cross-Strait issue is not germane to Tibet reconciliation, and contributions from Taiwan have been a major revenue source for the exile movement. He has not visited Taiwan since April 2001, but perhaps Chinese sensitivities are related to his meetings with President Chen Shui-bian, Vice-President Annette Lu, and former president Lee Teng-hui at that time.³⁸

Chinese diplomacy vis-à-vis the Dalai Lama has been cautious in public, but sufficiently open-ended in private to maintain interactions. China continues to object

36. 'Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the Forty-Sixth Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day, 10 March 2005', available at: <http://hhdl.dharmakara.net/hhdl10Mar2005.html>.

37. *Ibid.*

38. See 'Dalai Lama's Taiwan visit upsets China', *CNN.com*, (30 March 2001).

when states permit the Dalai Lama to visit, since he is still considered a political separatist who uses the cloak of religion. Moreover, the official reception of the Dalai Lama's deferential statements is that they are 'noticed', but that actions as well as words are necessary.³⁹ Of course, words remain important, especially the demand that the Dalai Lama 'declares in public that he recognizes Tibet and Taiwan are inalienable parts of China'. Then, according to a Foreign Ministry spokesman, 'we shall contact him for negotiations'.⁴⁰

The issue of 'greater Tibet' has led to more aggressive criticism of the Dalai Lama by local leaders in the TAR, including Zhang Qingli, the new Party secretary appointed in November 2005. There has also been specific criticism of the idea of expanding the TAR.⁴¹ Lodi Gyari's remarks at Brookings can be read as a reciprocation of this colder attitude in that it attempts to 'set the record straight' by presenting a defense of his position. Nevertheless, both sides are still within the framework of dialog, though the next step appears more difficult than the previous ones.

China's caution in changing its public stance is understandable given its embarrassing experiences in the 1980s and 1990s. However, it also has two negative consequences. First, it means that the Dalai Lama and those who support reconciliation have little to show for their deferential diplomacy thus far. There is considerable and sharp opposition to reconciliation with China among exiled Tibetans and their international supporters, and the lack of noticeable warming in China's position strengthens the critics. Second, continuing official hostility at the Center permits local individuals and groups within China who oppose reconciliation to represent their opinions as the government viewpoint. If there is a breakthrough in negotiations, there will be little preparation for it in the Chinese media. Politburo Standing Committee member Jia Qinglin's major speech in Lhasa commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Tibet Autonomous Region is notable for not mentioning separatism, but such nuances are easily lost in the general repetition of familiar slogans of unity and stability.⁴²

Returning to a general perspective on asymmetry, it is clear that the diplomacy of both sides has been through a learning process over the past 25 years. Initially each saw the resolution of the conflict in terms of the achievement of its unilateral aims. With disillusionment has come the sober realization that reconciliation requires negotiation, and that in turn implies interactive adjustment. The Dalai Lama has sustained a new pattern of deferential diplomacy for the past three years in response to China's implicit acknowledgement of autonomy in arranging the series of official meetings. There is of course considerable hostility and suspicion on both sides, and neither side wants to be the loser in a one-sided solution. But in

39. See for instance, 'FM spokesman declares just words aren't enough from Dalai Lama', *People's Daily Online*, (16 March 2005).

40. 'China opposes Dalai Lama's political activities: FM spokesman', *People's Daily Online*, (14 June 2005).

41. Yedor 益多, 'On the "middle way" of the Dalai Lama', *Tibet Information Network*, (28 July 2006), available at: http://info.tibet.cn/en/news/tin/t20060718_134212.htm.

42. Jia Qinglin, 'Talk at the 40th anniversary celebration'. However, the anniversary editorial of *Renmin Ribao* 人民日报 [*People's Daily, Chinese Edition*] does mention opposing separatism. See 'Shixian kuayue fazhan, zujin zhangzhijiu'an (shelun) 实现跨越发展 促进长治久安 (社论)' ['Transition to a new level of development, promote longterm stable government'], *Renmin Ribao* (1 September 2005), p. 1.

fact a trap by either side is unlikely, since both stand to gain in the move beyond stalemate.

5. The feasibility of normalization

More is involved in overcoming stalemate than initiating negotiation. States (and in the case of the Dalai Lama, governments in exile) may be unitary actors in the formal sense that their political leaderships can make war or declare peace, but the effectiveness of such decisions depends on the compliance of the communities involved. To take a contemporary example, Israel might arrange a ceasefire with the Palestinian Authority, but if Palestinians continue to launch missiles at Israel from Palestinian territory or the Israeli settlers do not move back to Israel, then the official arrangements are put in jeopardy by their ineffectiveness. There are other factors that affect the feasibility of normalization, but we will concentrate here on community compliance because it is the most significant factor for the Tibetan Question, and the one that is most affected by asymmetry.

Because of the lower level of threat perceived by the larger side, there is usually less coordination of its official actions as well as a greater diversity of societal interests vis-à-vis the smaller state. To take the example of the United States and Cuba, the American side includes both the anti-Castro Cubans in Miami and the soybean farmers in Minnesota selling to Cuba, and both have had noticeable and contradictory effects on US policy. Policy cohesiveness by the larger side in an asymmetric relationship (whether hostile or normal) will typically be in tension with the diversity of societal interests.

The smaller side feels more exposed in the relationship, and thus—especially if the relationship is hostile—members of its political community are less likely to put their own particular interests ahead of the national fate. However, it is unlikely that everyone will agree on what to do in the national crisis, and because of the severity of the threat the factional differences are likely to be heated. So the typical divisions of opinion in the smaller side are over what is to be done rather than efforts to protect various niche interests. The characteristic community divisions on the smaller side thus tend to be more ideological. Of course ideology often serves interests, and interests often wrap themselves in broader appeals, so the difference claimed here is more one of tone and tendency than a clear dichotomy of a cacophony of low interests on larger side and a righteous battle of high ideals on the smaller one.

From the general perspective of asymmetry, then, one would look for particular interests in China that might be threatened by reconciliation with the Dalai Lama, and for ideological stances in the exile community that would find reconciliation unacceptable. Both are present.

The major venue for threatened interests in China would be those who benefit from the current power structure of the TAR and are concerned about the introduction of new voices and pressures. Opposition to reconciliation is not likely to split simply along ethnic lines, because many Tibetans have benefited from the 40 years of the TAR, and many reform-minded Han Chinese in Tibet would like to see more diversity and openness in Chinese politics and therefore would support

reconciliation. But in general one might expect that the current political 'haves' in the TAR would react conservatively.⁴³

Local differences would also be reflected at the Center, especially in organs with routine responsibilities relating to Tibet. Perhaps it is reading too much into the documents, but there seems to be a considerable difference between the conservative, aggressive tone of the White Paper issued by the Information Office of the State Council called 'Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet', issued 24 May 2004, and the White Paper on 'Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities', issued by the same office on 28 February 2005. The larger scope of the second White Paper would require more than the usual Tibetan experts to be involved and also a higher level of leadership in coordination. To push the interpretation even further into speculation, perhaps the second report was issued in part to modify the tone set by the first.

On the side of the Dalai Lama, it is clear that some think that only victory is acceptable, and that negotiation implies a compromise with evil. The exiled Tibetan community originated in conflict with China, and since 1959 has become habituated to an anti-China stance. Beyond the ethnic exile Tibetans, many of those who actively support the various Tibetan movements are so convinced of the oppressiveness of Chinese rule that they could not imagine reconciliation. To take an illustrious example, the 6th edition of the *Lonely Planet Guide to Tibet* issued in May 2005 does not mention the ongoing negotiations, gives a resoundingly negative view of the Chinese presence in every form except restaurants, and does not give Chinese terms for place names.⁴⁴ Indeed, the only more nuanced stance is taken by the Dalai Lama himself, who begins his preface to the guidebook by observing, 'The issue of Tibet is not nearly as simple as is sometimes made out'.⁴⁵ A breakthrough in negotiations would cause dismay and confusion as well as rejoicing among people who consider themselves friends of Tibet.

Clearly both sides face considerable problems in implementing reconciliation even if it were achieved in principle at the bargaining table. On the other hand, both sides have different and unusual assets in controlling their respective sides. On China's side, no matter what the level or extent of local resistance to the return of the Dalai Lama, a decision made by the Center would brook no open opposition and would produce a sea change in media attitudes. Opinions that appear to be official now would become furtive, and opinions that now are too progressive to be voiced openly would become normal. Needless to say, the strength of the powers in place would remain formidable, and undoubtedly the reality of any new arrangements would be subjected to a thousand daily tests. But just as undoubtedly the Center would not allow open opposition, and over time resistance would diminish.

On the Dalai Lama's side, the opposition to reconciliation would undoubtedly be louder and more public, but the Dalai Lama's unique position of moral and political authority would prevail. Some might doubt the wisdom of his action, but few would

43. Good examples of such conservatism would be Chen Minghuai's article cited earlier, and a *Xinhua* interview with Qianbo Puncog, Chairman of the TAR, 'Dalai Lama more and more unpopular among Tibetans, says Chairman', *People's Daily Online* (1 June 2005). Given the current contacts, both of these appear to be aggressive statements of a conservative viewpoint that feels at risk. Neither mention the current contacts.

44. *Tibet* (London: Lonely Planet Publications, 2005).

45. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

abjure him as the legitimate leader. Perhaps only a few who followed him into exile would follow him out of exile, but those who remained abroad would no longer be exiles, but rather overseas Tibetans. Similarly, some non-Tibetan supporters would be upset, but few would consider themselves more truly Tibetan than the Dalai Lama. It is quite possible that even a reconciliation with his approval and participation will be rejected by some, but after an initial flurry of publicity they are likely to become fringe groups with little broader appeal. There is also the possibility of such fringe groups resorting to terrorist acts, but that possibility will be much smaller than would be the case if the efforts at reconciliation broke down completely, and the Dalai Lama's condemnation of such acts would draw a line between himself and any remnant extremists.

In general, the heavy burden of habituation to hostility that both sides bear creates an almost physical problem of negotiating an end to stalemate. As stalemate persists, it becomes the familiar setting of daily life and of individual expectations. By contrast, the end of stalemate, no matter how attractive as an ideal, becomes more remote and alien. Even for the leadership it is easier to treat the next day's policies as a continuation of a familiar situation rather than to decide on a strategic turn into unknown territory. Leadership may be able to bend the paths of political communities, but the strain leads to complaints and resistance. In the case of China and the Dalai Lama, the leaderships are in unusually strong positions at present, though on the exile side the situation depends completely on the health of the Dalai Lama. The bottom line is that reconciliation is feasible, but its likelihood is difficult to predict.

6. Conclusion: asymmetry and reconciliation

The Tibet Question is a limit case for asymmetry theory because, although there are clearly two actors of different capacities, there is not a claim of equal sovereign status on the part of the smaller side. And while both sides are capable of frustrating each other's purposes in a stalemate, the post-stalemate 'normalization' looks quite different from a normal international relation. If China and the Dalai Lama are reconciled, then the Dalai Lama returns to Tibet and the Tibetan government in exile ceases to exist. It would appear that China in this case would have 'answered' the Tibetan Question.

Reconciliation would not be so simple, however. If the Dalai Lama returns, China will have transformed an external conflict into an internal arrangement in which the autonomy of Tibet would be augmented and the diversity of its leadership increased. The Center can expect that the give and take between the TAR (and perhaps other Tibetan autonomous areas as well) will be much more lively and public. The Center's ultimate authority would not be challenged, but the course of policy formation and the weighting and composition of local input would be affected. This would in part be a result of the negotiations with the Dalai Lama, but it would also be a result of the fact of his return. With reconciliation, the Center would be modifying the internal landscape of politics in China so that more negotiation between center and localities would be necessary, and that the formation of local opinion in Tibet would be broadened beyond an imposed local leadership.

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To the extent that the Communist Party of China is seriously committed to raising its governing capacity, the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet would present a healthy challenge. Without questioning the role of the Party or the current constitutional arrangements of China, the presence of the Dalai Lama would be evidence of a new commitment to diversity and to popular input into government, and would contribute to a more meaningful concept of autonomous regions and more generally of local governance. The asymmetry of center and locality, like international asymmetries, is founded on a relationship of deference and autonomy. And, like normal international relationships, center–local relations are better managed than forced.

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