

China's prospects for industrial modernization, as Beijing turns to domestic market reform and external economic linkages in the hope of accelerating this process.

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Tibet: Issues for Americans. By HAROLD H. SAUNDERS, MELVYN C. GOLDSTEIN, RICHARD HOLBROOKE, SIDNEY R. JONES, DAVID M. LAMPTON and DWIGHT PERKINS. [National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, China Policy Series No. 4, 1992. 23 pp. \$3.00.]

The six members of the team who wrote this short report on their seven-day trip to Tibet were, respectively, ex-Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Director of the Tibet Centre at Case Western Reserve University, ex-Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, executive director of Asia Watch, president of the National Committee, which sponsored this study, and director of Harvard's Institute for International Development. The purpose of the trip was to increase American understanding of Tibet and to inform the Chinese of American concerns about what is happening there. The National Committee makes recommendations on aid but deliberately avoids basic questions such as sovereignty.

Outside Tibet the team interviewed the Dalai Lama and representatives of the exiled Tibetan community. In Beijing they met officials concerned with Tibet. Their week-long visit to the Tibet Autonomous Region in July–August 1991 included a brief survey of conditions in Lhasa, where they were permitted a strictly controlled visit to a prison and a two-hour “remarkable” (they don't say why) “unmonitored” discussion with monks in the Drepung monastery. The team observed that many Hans live and work in the city. They also spoke to the regional vice-chairman. They made even quicker visits to Lhoka, Zetang, and to a nomadic area north of Lhasa. In each of these places they met a few people, such as stone cutters from Xiamen, and a “randomly chosen” nomad.

The authors refer to “the Tibet problem” which they characterize as “agonizing.” Who endures this agony they do not say, nor do they say what it is. This presumably is left to organizations like Amnesty International (most recently in its May 1992 reports, “Repression in Tibet” and “Torture in Tibet”), to the accounts of travellers and journalists to Tibet, and to diplomatic missions such as the Australians in July 1991, who said, “A serious human rights problem exists in Tibet,” and referred to the “fettters” on religion, culture, education and language.

The team explicitly do not address two matters: “one of the nub issues... the definition of Tibet itself,” and the question of sovereignty. On the second issue, they say “Tibetans abroad” claim that Chinese rule was often non-existent or ineffective. This is also asserted by non-Tibetan authorities, such as H. E. Richardson, Michael Van Walt van Praag and Sir Algernon Rumbold, while Goldstein himself says in his recent magisterial *A History of Modern*

Tibet that between 1912 and 1950 “the Tibetan government alone still controlled Tibet.”

The authors state that while much religious freedom has been restored in Tibet, this has raised a serious problem for Beijing because the monks and nuns are the engine of protests in favour of Tibetan independence. They are concerned as well that almost any “development strategy” for Tibet contains the danger that the developing will be done by Hans, thus increasing their already large number in the Region – which, excluding the Army (200,000–300,000, they guess) they put at between 150,000 and 300,000, compared with just over two million Tibetans. They advise some international assistance to build up Tibetan skills but observe that “the people and culture of Tibet are in an uneven race against the forces of economic change and population pressure encroaching on them.”

On human rights, they emphasize it was not a fact-finding mission. It sought only to see how the issue is perceived. This seems odd: because the group had “substantial independence to meet and talk with a variety of citizens,” it must have been easy to find out about human rights, a common concern when Tibetans talk to foreigners.

The group concluded “the most striking aspect of the human rights situation” is the arrest as counter-revolutionaries of monks and nuns who hoist the illegal Tibetan flag or publicly call for independence. The team experienced “disquiet” about the Chinese definition of counter-revolution, and the report suggests that to reduce the human rights abuses (which are barely specified) it would be necessary “to somehow address the nationalist issue.” “Some” Tibetans want independence; the Chinese refuse to grant it. Imprisoning such Tibetans, the team notes, leads to difficulties between Beijing and Washington. But the team urges Americans to understand that expressions of support for Tibetan independence, especially from Congress, have great “potential consequences” for exacerbating the “volatile situation in Tibet” because Tibetans pay great attention to them. Instead, Americans should focus on the importance of the Dalai Lama returning to Tibet. Should he die in exile there could be a dangerous split about the succession. They should also focus on the need to protect Tibetan culture in the face of Han emigration.

The team was acting for the National Committee whose “bedrock objective” is increasing mutual understanding between Chinese and Americans. But although this was a high-powered team, and its conclusions will be taken seriously, especially by American policy-makers, the actual report is hard to classify. It says less about Tibet than many newspaper articles, human rights reports and diplomatic dispatches. In the face of the unquestioned enormities which have taken place in the Region under Chinese rule, such a studiously “balanced” report seems incongruous: although Beijing will be annoyed by the brief mention of human rights, it will be relieved that its legitimacy in Tibet is unchallenged. Some of the team’s suggestions, such as international assistance for training bicycle repairmen, stone cutters, and agronomists, resemble the cliché about rearranging the deck chairs as the Titanic sinks. Could such a report have been written about South Africa five years ago?

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