

# Controversies over Tibet: China versus India, 1947–49

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To the present Beijing Government, Tibet constitutes an integral part of China, officially known as the Tibetan Autonomous Region. The 20th anniversary of its founding was celebrated on 1 September 1985. However, to the 14th Dalai Lama (the former spiritual and temporal leader of Tibet), who has been living in exile in India since 1959, and to thousands of Tibetans living as refugees in India and other parts of the world, the current status of Tibet is open to contention, and as such remains an unresolved issue.

This article analyses the disputes over Tibet between two neighbouring countries, newly-independent India and Nationalist China, in the years from 1947 to 1949. An investigation into these controversies will reveal China's traditional stance on Tibet and how India, while declaring full independence from the British Raj, nevertheless adopted the British Empire's Tibetan policy. Further, an examination of Tibet's role in these controversies may also help to explain some of the reasons behind Beijing's military occupation in 1950.

The re-examination of the earlier Sino-Indian controversies over Tibet in sequence is, therefore, significant to the present.

## *The Post-Second World War Setting*

The end of the Second World War in August 1945 ushered in a period of transition in the Indian sub-continent and the beginning of civil war in China. While the British transfer of power in the sub-continent led to the partition of Pakistan from India, China plunged into full-scale internecine warfare between the Nationalists and the Communists. Unusually friendly relations between Nationalist China and new India were established at the time of the formation of the Interim Government of India in September 1946, improved with India's independence in August 1947, only to deteriorate with the withdrawal of the National Government at Nanjing in early 1949, and were finally terminated when India recognized the People's Republic on 30 December of the same year.

During this short period the only issue to interrupt the otherwise cordial relations between Nationalist China and new India was that of Tibet. The following incidents involving Tibet led to a continuing deterioration in their relations: (1) China's disapproval of India inviting China and Tibet separately to the Asian Conference; (2) Tibet's claim to India's border area involving the McMahon Line; (3) China's insistence on reviewing and then terminating the 1908 Tibet Trade Regulations, which was disputed by India; (4) while bypassing China to travel abroad, the Tibetan Trade Delegation kept close

contacts with New Delhi; (5) when the Chinese Mission at Lhasa was expelled, India questioned China's suzerainty over Tibet; and (6) the former British Representative remained in Lhasa after independence to represent the new India.

*India's Separate Invitation of China and Tibet to the Asian Conference*

It was Jawaharlal Nehru, as head of the Interim Government of India, who convened the first Asian Relations Conference at New Delhi on the eve of India's independence. On receiving the invitation, the Chinese Nationalists were sceptical of Nehru's motives in organizing such an unprecedented conference at that time. Indeed, the convening of the first Asian Conference in India without consulting China in advance had displeased his Chinese friends. They could not help thinking that he intended to use it to promote his personal prestige.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, a far-reaching controversy between Nehru and China ensued when India invited Tibet to attend as an independent state. Dai Jitao, one of the most senior national leaders, who had visited India earlier as a friend of Nehru, would have led the Chinese delegation to the conference, but in the circumstances he declined. He interpreted the separate invitation of Tibet behind China's back as an indication of Nehru having some ulterior motive in mind.

Thereupon Dai asked the Tibetan authorities to send their delegates to the conference together with the Chinese delegation, and the National Government at Nanjing offered to pay their travelling expenses. But it was too late for the Nanjing Government to prevail on Tibet. To the Chinese Nationalists, Tibet had been part of the frontier area of China since the Qing dynasty and the Tibetans were officially recognized as one of the chief national minorities of China.

The Chinese and Tibetan delegates happened to meet on board the same aircraft en route to Delhi. Perhaps this prompted the Chinese delegates to take action as soon as they arrived at their destination. Taking up the issue of the Tibetan representation with the Indian Interim Government, they proclaimed that the principle of the integrity of China's territory and sovereignty was not to be misinterpreted. As a result, Tibet was not listed at the Conference as an independent country.

Nevertheless, at the preparatory session a world map was on view showing Tibet outside the national border of China. Zheng Yanfen, head of the Chinese delegation, took the matter up with Nehru, who at first tried to set it aside, but later agreed to make a correction. Early on the day of inauguration, the Chinese noticed that the map remained

1. Dai Jitao, *Dai Jitao wencun (Dai Jitao's Collected Works)* edited by Chen Tianxi (Taipei: n.p.; n.d.), pp. 386–97. See also, Zheng Yanfen, "Yongnian Dai Jitao xian sheng" ("My perpetual memories of Dai Jitao"), in *Zhuanji wenxue (Biographical Literature)*, October 1971 (Taipei: P.O. Box 1–36, *Biographical Literature*).

unchanged. The Chinese Government Observer, George Yeh, a distinguished diplomat, approached Nehru and insisted that unless the map was properly corrected the Chinese would withdraw. With the consent of Nehru, Yeh, who happened to be a calligrapher and painter, amended the map by painting the Tibetan region in the same colour as that used for China.<sup>2</sup>

The Conference on Asian Relations was said to have been initiated by the Indian Council of World Affairs, a non-governmental organization, the object of which was to promote the study of international and Indian affairs. As originally planned by the Indian Council, the Asian Relations Conference was also non-political: "It will primarily discuss economic, social and cultural problems common to all Asian countries. It will not consider controversial political problems of any country."<sup>3</sup>

Attended by some 250 delegates from 28 Asian countries, including Soviet Asia, the Asian Relations Conference took place in New Delhi from 23 March through 4 April 1947. It was held under the leadership of Nehru and Mrs Sarojini Naidu, a poet and one of the elder leaders of the Indian National Congress, with blessings from Mohandas K. Gandhi, the Mahatma. Among the delegates were certain individuals later to become prominent in Asian politics, for example, Mr Bandarnaike, subsequently prime minister of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and Ho Chi Min of Vietnam.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from the Chinese Government Observer mentioned above, the Chinese delegation included Wen Yuanning, a writer-diplomat, Wang Xinggong, president of the National Sun Yat-Sen University, Hang Liwu, vice-minister of education, and Tan Yunshan, director of Chinese studies at Vishva-Bharati University in India. The leader of the delegation, as mentioned above, was Zheng Yanfen, director of the Sanminzhuyi (the Three Principles of the People) Youth Corp.

Apparently having sensed the displeasure of the Chinese delegates, in his inauguration speech Nehru first of all extended his welcome to China:

We welcome you delegates and representatives from China, that great country to which Asia owes so much and from which so much is expected . . .<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, Nehru was tactful in welcoming Tibet together with Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma and Ceylon as "our neighbours . . . to whom we look especially for co-operation and close and friendly intercourse."<sup>6</sup>

2. Zheng Yanfen, "My perpetual memories."

3. Indian Council of World Affairs, *Asia* (issued on the occasion of the Asian Conference at New Delhi, 1947) (New Delhi: ICWA, 1947), p. 78.

4. Bimla Prasad, *The Origins of Indian Foreign Policy, 1885-1947* (Calcutta: Bookland, 1972), p. 253.

5. Jawaharlal Nehru, "Asia finds herself again," *Independence and After, A Collection of Speeches* (New York: Books for Libraries, 1950), p. 296.

6. *Ibid.*

The Tibetan delegates themselves appeared to be mainly interested in religion. They brought to the Conference, as well as to India, a message from the Dalai Lama bearing his holy seal. The leader of the Tibetan delegation addressed the Conference as follows:

We are a country which administers its subjects based on religious aspirations, and as India is the land of Buddhism, we Buddhists and especially Tibet, had friendly relations with India from ancient times.<sup>7</sup>

The last British Viceroy to India, Lord Mountbatten, later gave a reception to members of both the Chinese and Tibetan delegations.<sup>8</sup> The Tibet controversy at the Conference diminished somewhat thereafter, but it undoubtedly made an impression upon the participants.

By holding group discussions without passing resolutions, the Conference functioned in an informal and non-committal way. Perhaps its only action was to found the Asian Relations Organization, to which Nehru was elected president. A second conference was to be held in China, but subsequent developments made that impossible. Hence, the new organization soon proved to be abortive, and the Asian Relations Conference involving the Tibet issue was the first and the last to be held.

### *Tibet's Claim to India's Border Area and the McMahon Line*

No sooner had India attained independence in August 1947 than the Tibetan authorities in Lhasa approached India with a claim to India's border area. Since Tibet, still known in the late 1940s as the Forbidden Land to the outside world, made its demand quietly, Nehru, the prime minister, could easily ignore it. The exchange of messages between the two parties in October 1947 was kept confidential until 12 years later when Nehru revealed it in his reply to the debate on India's border dispute with China in the Lok Sabha (House of the People) in September 1959. Nehru stated that the People's Republic of China had, in a recent letter to India, referred to a telegram from Lhasa to India in 1947. The point made in the letter was that Tibet, now part of China, had claimed the return of her territory from India as early as 1947. Nehru further admitted:

It is true that we received a telegram from the Tibetan Bureau in Lhasa, claiming the return of Tibetan territory on the boundary of India and Tibet.<sup>9</sup>

The claim was further disclosed by the publication of the exchange of letters in September 1959 between Zhou Enlai, prime minister of the People's Republic, and Nehru. In answer to Zhou's letter, Nehru spoke of the "alleged Tibetan territories on [the] boundaries of India

7. *Indian Annual Register* (1947), Vol. I (New Delhi: Indian Annual Register), p. 280.

8. *Indian Information*, 15 April 1947 (New Delhi: Indian Information).

9. *Foreign Affairs Record*, Vol. 9 (September 1939) (New Delhi: FAR), p. 229.

and Tibet” that Tibet had demanded in 1947.<sup>10</sup> The list of territories extended from Bhutan to Ladakh, including Darjeeling and Sikkim (annexed as a state of India in 1975). Nehru added, “the areas claimed by Tibet had not been defined.”<sup>11</sup>

By claiming the above territories, Tibet would seem to have been disputing the so-called McMahon Line. The map with the dividing line between India and Tibet was originally drawn by Sir Arthur McMahon on behalf of the British Indian Government and attached to the Simla Convention of 1914. However, China was not a signatory to the Convention, nor had she accepted the McMahon Line *per se*. The line itself runs roughly along the crest of the Himalayas from the northern border of Bhutan to the north of Burma. Thus, the areas of Sikkim, Darjeeling and Assam lie south of the line and fall within the then Sikkim Protectorate of British India and thus within India itself.

Did the demand for these territories by Tibet for whatever reason signify Tibet’s categorical repudiation of the McMahon Line? Zhou Enlai wrote two letters in succession to Nehru in this regard. Condemning the McMahon Line as “a product of the British policy of aggression against the Tibet region of China,” he first wrote, “the Tibet local authorities were in fact dissatisfied with this unilaterally drawn line.”<sup>12</sup> In his second letter, Zhou simply called it the “illegal line” and reminded Nehru of Tibet’s 1947 message to him.<sup>13</sup>

There is reason to believe that the present Dalai Lama does not accept the McMahon Line as delineating the border between Tibet and India. First, he was the foremost authority in Lhasa to have claimed India’s border area in 1947. Secondly, even in exile the views he has expressed on the Line have been unfavourable. In September 1959, about five months after his flight from Tibet to India, the Dalai Lama was publicly criticized by Nehru for statements he had made in India which were “quite incorrect,”<sup>14</sup> some of which referred to the McMahon Line. Evidently the Dalai Lama was no adherent of the McMahon Line, whereas Nehru was.

A study of the drawing of the McMahon Line in relation to the Sino-Indian border war in 1962 by Neville Maxwell has revealed an agreement made between the British and the Tibetans.

The Tibetans . . . regarded the McMahon boundary as part of a package deal, in which they were to be compensated for the cession of some territory to the British by gaining, with British help, a satisfactory boundary with and a large degree of independence from China. Since the British had failed to produce

10. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, *White Paper*, No. II, p.39.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Government of India, *White Paper*, 1954–1959, p. 53.

13. Government of India, *White Paper II*, p. 29.

14. Jawaharlal Nehru, *India’s Foreign Policy*, Selected Speeches, September 1946–April 1961. (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1961), p. 353.

those compensatory concessions the Tibetans argued that they could not be held to their agreement on the McMahon Line.<sup>15</sup>

If this is an accurate description of the historical background, Tibet's demand for the return of certain parts of its territory earlier ceded to British India would seem to have some justification, similarly with Tibet's repudiation of the British-dictated McMahon Line.

To the 1947 Tibetan claim on India's border area Nehru made an adept reply without actually disputing the claim itself:

The Government of India would be glad to have an assurance that it is the intention of the Tibetan Government to continue relations on the existing basis until new agreements are reached on matters that either party may wish to take up. This is the procedure adopted by all other countries with which India has inherited treaty relations from His Majesty's Government.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, Nehru was far from reluctant to inherit British treaty privileges in Tibet including the McMahon Line. Consequently, an acceptance of the Tibetan claim, which would include such places as Darjeeling and Sikkim, lying south of the McMahon Line and within India's territory, was out of the question. As for India's stance on the McMahon Line, K. P. S. Menon, the first Indian ambassador to Nationalist China, made the authoritative statement, "the Government of India simply took the McMahon Line for granted."<sup>17</sup>

Despite being deeply concerned about Tibet and the McMahon Line, in all probability Nationalist China knew nothing of Tibet's claim on India's border area and Nehru's reply in 1947. This is indicated by the absence of information on the exchange of messages between Tibet and India in 1947 in related Nationalist publications. The detailed "Important Diplomatic Records Relating to the Sino-Indian Border and the Tibet Issue," a paper published in 1962 and prefaced by Luo Jialun, Chinese ambassador to India from 1947 to 1949, makes no mention at all of the 1947 Tibeto-Indian exchange.<sup>18</sup>

### *China's Notification of Reviewing the Tibet Trade Regulations Agreement of 1908*

Unaware, it would seem, of direct contact between Tibet and India, Nationalist China was still pursuing a cautious Tibetan policy. In 1948 the "Agreement Between Great Britain, China and Tibet Amending Trade Regulations in Tibet of 1908" was to be reviewed. As prescribed, the Agreement could be renewed or revised at the end

15. Neville Maxwell, *India's China War* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), pp. 41–42. Reference made to Sir Robert Reid, *History of the Frontier . . . Bordering on Assam*.

16. Government of India, *White Paper II*, p. 39.

17. K.P.S. Menon, *Many Worlds: An Autobiography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 270.

18. Zhao Shixun, "Youguan Zhong-Yin bianjie yu Xizang de waijiao jilu" ("Diplomatic records relating to the Sino-Indian border and Tibet"), *Zhuanji wenxue* (*Biographical Literature*), January 1963 (Taipei).



of every 10 years at the instigation of any one party, otherwise the Regulations would remain valid. The Nationalist Government of China at Nanjing, therefore, notified Britain and the two newly-independent governments of India and Pakistan that the 1908 Tibet Trade Agreement was to be terminated. In reply, Pakistan acceded to China's demand. Great Britain replied that she had forsaken all of her privileges derived from the old treaties in China, and that China should enter into talks directly with both India and Pakistan concerning Tibet.<sup>19</sup>

However, Nehru's reply to Nanjing was tantamount to a refutation of China's notification. India asserted that (1) since independence India considered that she had inherited all the rights and obligations derived from the conventions concluded between British India and Tibet; and (2) the relationship between India and Tibet was now governed by the Simla Convention of 1914 and the Anglo-Tibetan Regulations of the same year.<sup>20</sup> According to India the 1908 Trade Regulations Agreement had long been invalid and so there was no basis for either its termination or renewal. In other words, India adhered only to the 1914 Simla Convention which China had never signed nor accepted. Consequently the intransigence of both China and India prevented the two countries from reaching agreement upon even a single aspect of trade relations with Tibet.

### *Tibet Sent Its Trade Delegation Abroad*

Almost concurrent with the exchange of notes between Nanjing and New Delhi concerning the 1908 Tibet Trade Agreement, the Lhasa administration sought to establish trade links with the outside world. In an unprecedented step it sent a delegation abroad, headed by Tsepon Shakabpa, a member of the *Kashag* or council in charge of the treasury. As the Dalai Lama later wrote, in 1948 the delegation visited India, China, France, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States. He still relished having sent a successful Tibetan mission abroad when he wrote, "the passports which the Tibetan Government had issued to the delegates were accepted by the governments of all these countries."<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the Chinese Embassy, as Ambassador Luo related, looked on helplessly when the Tibetan delegation made three visits to New Delhi between February 1948 and January 1949.

The delegation, having been accorded the status of representing an independent country, was officially received by the Government of India. Not wishing to prejudice the otherwise friendly relations between India and China the Chinese Embassy refrained from lodging an official protest. Instead, Luo Jialun wrote a tactful letter to Prime

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.* India's note to Nanking is a translation from the Chinese version.

21. Ngawang Lobsang (the 14th Dalai Lama), *My Land and My People* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), p. 78.

Minister Nehru in January 1949 expressing his concern about the talks between the Indian Government and the Tibetan Trade Delegation, which had recently returned from abroad. The ambassador stated that the Delegation had exceeded its functions and India should decline the Delegation's proposals, which might subvert the integrity of China's territory and sovereignty. The letter concluded that China, being in a state of crisis, hoped that the Indian Government would show its understanding and co-operation.<sup>22</sup>

The ambassador's letter was answered by K. P. S. Menon, India's deputy foreign minister at the time, acting on the instructions of Prime Minister Nehru. Menon assured the Chinese ambassador that India had no intention whatsoever of subverting the integrity of China's sovereignty and territory. India could not imagine doing anything to upset China at such a difficult time.<sup>23</sup> Another source, however, disclosed that the Tibetan Trade Delegation had included a member of the military. It was suspected that the scope of the Delegation's talks with the Indian Government might not have been limited to such trade matters as demanding the regulations of India's control on Tibetan exports of wool and musk.<sup>24</sup>

Earlier, the Nanjing Government, realizing it was not in a position to stop the departure of the Tibetan Trade Delegation, tried to exercise influence over it. Prior to its western trip, the Delegation actually visited Nanjing at the insistence of the Chinese ambassador to India. The head of the Delegation, Shakabpa, asked the Chinese National Government for a grant of two million American dollars. The government reached a compromise by presenting the Delegation with a sum of U.S.\$50,000 and offering a large assignment of silk fabrics at a bargain price.<sup>25</sup> It was understandable that in war-torn China the Tibetan Delegation never committed itself to the Nanjing Government, but acted entirely on its own.

### *The Expulsion of the Chinese Nationalist Mission at Lhasa*

The ever-deteriorating position of the National Government in its war against the Communists irrevocably weakened its established official mission in Tibet. At a time when the National Government moved from Nanjing to Canton, Nationalist China was desperately fighting a losing battle. Many local chiefs or generals, on being threatened or defeated by the Communists, either proclaimed themselves neutral or surrendered. It was under these circumstances that the Lhasa administration took drastic action to oust the Chinese Nationalists' Mission in Lhasa in July 1949.

Under the signatures of all the *kalons* or cabinet ministers, Tibet

22. Zhao Shixun, "Diplomatic records."

23. *Ibid.* Menon's letter from the Chinese version.

24. Li T'ieh-tseng, *Tibet, Today and Yesterday* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1960), p. 197.

25. Zhao Shixun, "Diplomatic records."



dispatched a telegram to President Chiang Kai-shek, justifying Tibet's sudden action and indicating Tibet's view on its relations with China. It said that as the war between the central Kuomintang Government and the Chinese Communists was continuing, communist instigations and intrigues occurred wherever central government officials and troops were stationed. Accordingly the staff of the various offices of the central government in Tibet could not be ignored. It was rumoured that communist sympathizers among the Han people and the Pa-ans from the western area of China were residing in Lhasa and elsewhere in Tibet. In the interests of the political situation in China and Tibet and Tibetan internal security, all communist suspects were to be expelled. But in the absence of an effective method of screening and to prevent further communist penetration, Tibet requested all the staff of the Commission of the Central Government, radio station, and hospitals and other suspects to leave for home by a definite date. The *kalons* further stated that the Lhasa Government would bear the travel expenses of all staff members of various offices and provide free escort troops and office bearers. Arrangements were also being made to escort other Han Chinese and Pa-ans suspected of communist sympathies. The message concluded by expressing the hope that the Chinese Nationalist Government would appreciate the consideration of security and would not interpret this action as offensive and harsh.<sup>26</sup>

By this time Chiang had temporarily stepped down and the then Chinese prime minister rejected the Tibetan message of ouster, but to no avail. At Lhasa, the head of the Chinese Mission was first summoned and informed of the decision requiring the Chinese to leave Tibet in a week. All Chinese officials had to leave via India, while non-governmental Chinese were to be sent back to Qinghai and Sikang, the two provinces of China to the north-east and the east of Tibet. (Having later merged into the province of Sichuan, Sikang no longer exists.) Before his departure the head of the Mission had a ceremonious farewell interview with the Dalai Lama and the Regent followed by a dinner party, attended also by all the Chinese officials, given by the *kalons*. On 20 July 1949 the Mission was formally dispatched by representatives of the *kashag* or Tibetan Council.

Did the Indian Government become involved in the Tibet action of 1949? Since the Chinese Radio Station at Lhasa was sealed off, the Chinese Mission could no longer communicate with the outside world. The Chinese Embassy at New Delhi had been kept in the dark until news about the incident at Lhasa was reported elsewhere. At a press conference, Ambassador Luo dismissed the report of communist elements in the Chinese Mission there as pure fabrication. At the time he had to depend upon the Indian Ministry of External Affairs for information about the expelled Chinese officials. From the outset, Menon, the deputy foreign minister, had been disinclined to funnel

26. Wu Juncai, *Yindu duli yu Zhong-yin guanxi (India's Independence and Sino-Indian Relations)* (Taipei: pub. by the author, 1950), p. 146.

information he had gathered through the Indian Mission at Lhasa. He quoted the allegation of communist elements in the Chinese Mission, which he had learned from H. E. Richardson, the British Trade Agent in Tibet during the period of British India and subsequently head of the Indian Mission at Lhasa. Furthermore, Menon suggested (perhaps gathered from another source of intelligence) that the Lhasa Government had reason to believe General Ma Bufang, the Muslim governor of Qinghai, might be driven to Tibet by the Communists.

### *The Question of China's Suzerainty*

The question of China's suzerainty over Tibet now arose. The Press Trust of India (PTI), the government-run news agency, reported that Tibet had never recognized China's suzerainty. The Chinese Mission at Lhasa was disparaged for consisting simply of two Chinese delegations, the first of which had come to Lhasa for the funeral service of the 13th Dalai Lama in 1933 and the second for the instalment of the present 14th Dalai Lama in 1939, both having remained thereafter. Luo Jialun reasoned that formerly, when the British had adopted an aggressive policy towards Tibet, they, nevertheless, had recognized China's suzerainty, if not sovereignty, over Tibet. As recounted by PTI, it was now free India that would not accept China's suzerainty over Tibet. Menon, according to Luo, declined to comment on this.<sup>27</sup>

As Menon later wrote, his understanding of Tibet in relation to India and China was that independent India had inherited the British commitment, that is "the British Government of India had undertaken to support the independence of Tibet, subject to the suzerainty of China."<sup>28</sup> He did not elaborate how an acceptance of China's suzerainty and support of Tibet's independence could exist side-by-side. Probably trying to be impartial in this regard, Nehru repudiated the factual existence of an independent Tibet. "At no time did any country, any foreign country consider it independent."<sup>29</sup> The Dalai Lama also admitted that when he fled to India, Nehru had told him privately, "nobody had ever formally recognized (Tibet's) independence."<sup>30</sup>

However, Nehru interpreted the old Tibet policy of British India in 1950 as taking two positions: while recognizing Tibet's autonomy, it also vaguely recognized the suzerainty of China over Tibet. He stressed the point, "We have accepted that policy. We take the two positions together."<sup>31</sup> Speaking again in 1958 on the conflict between China and Tibet, he recalled, "We had some trouble over this matter

27. Zhao Shixun, "Diplomatic records."

28. Menon, *Many Worlds*, p. 270.

29. *Foreign Affairs Record* (August 1958), p. 146.

30. Lobsang, *My Land*, p. 148.

31. Nehru, *Before and After Independence*, pp. 597–98.

at the time of Chiang Kai-shek.”<sup>32</sup> But he added that India had acknowledged Tibet as an autonomous region of China in Chiang’s period.<sup>33</sup> Had that been the case, there should not have been any controversy over Tibet between China and India. Most probably Nehru had never conveyed this understanding to the Nationalist leaders. It was not until some 10 years later that Nehru asserted, “Naturally, when we became independent, we did not wish to have any extraterritorial rights in Tibet.”<sup>34</sup>

In this connection, it should be worthwhile to take note of what the British said at the time when Tibet expelled the Chinese Mission. The British press appeared to be factual and non-committal in its reports and comments on the Tibet incident. The Hong Kong correspondent of *The Times* interpreted the expulsion of the Chinese Mission from Tibet as follows:

Tibetans have always contested the Chinese claim to suzerainty over their country. It is not surprising that they should have taken advantage of China’s present embarrassments to get rid of Chinese officials.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, the reporter discounted the Tibetan allegations of suspected communist elements among the Chinese officials in Tibet. In its leading article, “Separatism in China,” *The Times* treated the Lhasa incident as a sort of “local separatism” in remote areas in China where central government authority was declining.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the question of China’s suzerainty over Tibet remained unresolved.

The Lhasa Tibetans have expelled the Chinese Mission which stood as a symbol of Chinese suzerainty over central and western Tibet, the Dalai Lama and his advisers have thus asserted their independence.<sup>37</sup>

#### *A Final Note on the Chinese Mission*

With more than 80 people, the expelled Chinese Mission travelled like a caravan towards India. They halted at Yatung for some time to await a transit permit from the Indian Government. They were not allowed to take the main route via Gangtok, Sikkim, but had to travel by a local path. The Indian Government was then approached through the head of its Mission at Lhasa, Richardson, to permit the departing Chinese to pass through Indian territory. Having expressed its concern over “the virtual expulsion of the diplomatic representatives of a friendly Government,” the Indian Government reluctantly granted a transit permit.<sup>38</sup> The Chinese Mission trailed past Kalimpong and Calcutta in India and then sailed for China.

32. *Foreign Affairs Record*, August 1958, p. 146.

33. *Ibid.* p. 147.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *The Times* (London), 28 July 1949, p. 7.

36. *Ibid.* 29 July 1949, p. 7.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *The Statesman* (New Delhi), 30 July 1949, p. 1.

*The Former British Representative Retained to Represent India*

Was Tibet's action part of an international conspiracy? Luo Jialun assumed so, and he took Richardson to task. Writing years later, Luo still pointed out emphatically that Richardson really acted as an envoy to Tibet and had previously been engaged in planning the annexation of Tibet by Britain.<sup>39</sup> As a personal witness to Tibet's expulsion of the Chinese, the head of the Chinese Mission recounted how Richardson was extremely active, and that visitors frequented his office in early July when the Tibetan *koshag* expelled the Chinese.<sup>40</sup>

Being the long-standing British representative at Lhasa, Richardson attracted much Chinese attention. Luo Jialun recalled how he advised Nehru to remove the British agent from office during the pre-independence Interim Government of India period. Nehru agreed with Luo in principle, but said that he could not make important personnel changes as he had not yet taken over the government. He promised to be able to do it soon. Then, Luo added, once Nehru was in power, Richardson was not only not replaced as the head of India's Tibet Mission, but he was also entrusted with more responsibility.<sup>41</sup> Apart from the denouncement made by the Chinese ambassador at the time and later by the People's Republic of China, Richardson was also criticized by members of the Indian Left. *Blitz*, a left-wing weekly, published in Bombay, reproached the Indian Government for extending the service of Richardson and also evinced its keen interest in the British and American involvement in Tibet in 1949.<sup>42</sup>

Richardson would seem to have played an extraordinary role in Tibet. He was attached to the British Mission to Lhasa in the 1930s under the Political Officer in Sikkim, whose duty was to keep an eye on Tibet. At the time of the transfer of power in India, he was the only Englishman in the Indian foreign service whom the new Government of India retained. In the words of K. P. S. Menon, his I.C.S. (Indian Civil Service) colleague, Richardson "was in love with Tibet in the Charles Bell tradition and had a corresponding suspicion of the Chinese."<sup>43</sup> Presumably comparable to Bell and his mission to Lhasa in the early 1920s, Richardson also enjoyed the confidence of the Lhasa authorities. He strengthened Tibet's defence and established close ties between Britain and Tibet.

After retiring from the British Indian Service and the Indian Foreign Service, Richardson published his story of Tibet, including his work there. The expulsion of the Chinese Mission at Lhasa in July 1949, as he saw it, was striking evidence of Tibetan independence. He attributed the expulsion to the belief that some communist agents might already have been active in the Chinese Mission and that some of its members might soon have transferred their allegiance to Mao

39. Zhao Shixun, "Diplomatic records."

40. Li, *Tibet*, p. 199.

41. Zhao Shixun, "Diplomatic records."

42. *Ibid.* See also *Blitz* weekly (Bombay), 20 August 1949.

43. Menon, *Many Worlds*, p. 270.

Zedong. Contrary to Chinese allegations, Richardson credited the expulsion to the Tibetan Government by saying, “the action was swift and secret. It was a complete surprise to the Indian Mission.”<sup>44</sup>

Some 10 years after Tibet’s expulsion of the Chinese Mission, Nehru had a word of apology for having retained Richardson’s service. This was one of the points Nehru made in answer to Communist China’s charges of “Indian expansionists” that had inherited British imperialism. Nehru related:

...in the early days after independence and partition, our hands were full, ...and we had to face very difficult situations in our country. We ignored ... Tibet. Not being able to find a suitable person to act as our representative at Lhasa, we allowed for some time the existing British representative to continue at Lhasa.<sup>45</sup>

Here Nehru admitted that it was simply out of expediency that India had retained Richardson in Tibet.

#### *Transfer to India of the British Heritage in Tibet*

On the very day of India’s independence, 15 August 1947, the British Mission at Lhasa was renamed the Indian Mission, but the same British representative and the entire staff were retained; only the flag was changed.<sup>46</sup> India continued to station its army detachments in Tibet and maintained the Indian postal and telegraph installations and rest houses.

Richardson further disclosed in his memoirs what was probably top secret at the time that during the year following India’s independence, that is, 1948, the Lhasa Government intensified military preparations and approached India for matériel. India responded favourably and sent senior officers to Gyantse for consultation.<sup>47</sup> The Chinese Mission at Lhasa departed in July 1949. Consequently, India became the only foreign country officially represented at Lhasa and assumed British rights in Tibet until Chinese Communist troops marched in.

Later Richardson sharply criticized Nehru for his views on Tibet and his Tibetan policy. As a British representative carrying out a forward Tibet policy, Richardson was critical of Nehru’s pronouncements implying recognition of Chinese suzerainty. Had Nehru truly condemned British rights in Tibet, Richardson observed, Nehru’s Government should not have held on to them after India’s independence. He wrote:

At all events, in 1947 when an obvious opportunity presented itself for a generous gesture to the Tibetan Government by offering to give up those “unwanted” rights, nothing of the sort was done. On the contrary, it appeared

44. H.E. Richardson, *A Short History of Tibet* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1962), p. 177.

45. *Foreign Affairs Record*, Vol. IV, April 1959, p. 120.

46. Richardson, *History of Tibet*, p. 173.

47. *Ibid.* p. 178.

at that time that the rights were of value to the Indian Government... and that the Indian Government was anxious to secure Tibetan consent to the transfer of the British heritage.<sup>48</sup>

Nehru could have won the goodwill of both Tibet and China and perhaps even averted later developments in Tibet which seriously involved India, if he had volunteered to relinquish British rights in Tibet upon India's independence.

### *Conclusion*

The above concerning Tibet occurred between 1947 and 1949 demonstrated that Nehru's India gained the upper hand at the expense of Nationalist China. By inviting China and Tibet separately to the Asian Relations Conference in 1947 Nehru upset China and precipitated the ensuing disputes over Tibet. In October 1947 Nehru tactfully laid aside Tibet's claim to India's border area, which implied the repudiation of the McMahon Line. Whereas Nehru simply rejected Nationalist China's demand for reviewing the 1908 Tibet Trade Regulations, he had no objection to promoting the Tibetan Trade Delegation abroad especially in India.

With the expulsion of the Chinese Mission in Tibet, the question of China's suzerainty, if not sovereignty, over Tibet arose. Nehru eloquently refuted the notion of Tibet's independence, admitted China's suzerainty over Tibet as had the British, and even spoke of Tibet being an autonomous region of China. However, Nehru's Tibet policy in reality manifested itself to be otherwise, by inheriting all British privileges, as he termed the British extraterritorial rights, himself. The retention of the former British Representative in Tibet, H. E. Richardson, as the head of the Indian Mission there symbolized the continuity of the British forward Tibet policy. It is certainly instructive to read how even Richardson would come to be critical of the inconsistency of Nehru's talk on Tibet and his policy. Undoubtedly the new India's policy in Tibet had frustrated the then Nationalist China, and perhaps incited and, indeed, prompted the new communist regime to mount the military occupation of Tibet in October 1950.

48. *Ibid.* p. 176.