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ENTERING THE COLD WAR AND OTHER “WARS”: THE TIBETAN EXPERIENCE

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The Tibetan question of the Twentieth Century can be examined in more than one frame of time. As of the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Tibet had assumed significance in three temporalities. First, it was one of the major territorial issues China encountered in the process of territoriality transformation since the mid-Nineteenth Century. Then, after 1911, it posed a serious interethnic and intercultural challenge to the Chinese Revolution. Lastly, in the wake of World War II, it became a locale of international intrigues of the Cold War. In focusing on the evolvement of the Chinese Communist Party's policy toward Tibet around 1949, the article problematizes previous interpretations of the Chinese Communist advance into Tibet in 1950 that remain under spells cast by the opposing political forces of the time.

KEYWORDS: *Tibet, transformation of territoriality, Chinese Revolution, Cold War*

Defining the Cold War as a contest between two opposing versions of European modernity, Odd Arne Westad nevertheless contends in *The Global Cold War* that the Cold War conceptually and analytically belongs to the “south,” or the Third World countries. This is because, first, the two superpowers’ respective interventionism shaped the international and domestic frameworks in which Third World countries had to operate, and, second, Third World leaders made ideological choices between the two versions above and thus took sides in the Cold War between the two superpowers.¹ In the wake of World War II, the Cold War dominated the international scene for a considerable length of time. As pointed out by Westad, however, it was neither the sole discourse nor the full story of the international history during that lengthy period. Other “wars,” if the use of “war” here can accentuate the significance of historical processes, existed and shaped regional or local conditions more than the Cold War. These “wars” should therefore be studied together with the Cold War for any national and regional histories. Another issue is that, even if a Cold War inquiry of the experiences of the period is in question, regional, national, and local perspectives of Third World areas must be taken into account to determine when, how, and why any actor of

¹ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Intervention and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 3–4.

international politics (be it a “nation” or any other type of political entity capable of international involvement) joined one side of the Cold War, which was *European* in essence. This is to say that the Third World countries’ “belligerency” in the Cold War is more difficult to ascertain than any belligerency in an ordinary shooting war. When the Cold War and the other “wars” forged ahead simultaneously, interesting questions occurred: did these wars overlap? If so, which joined or interfered with which? Did the Cold War globalize the Third World, or did the Third World localize the Cold War? And so on.

This article uses Tibet as a case to explore some of these questions, analyzing mainly the Chinese side of the story. Between 1945 and 1949, China began to become entangled with the Cold War as the Chinese Nationalists and the Chinese Communists fought a civil war with American and Soviet involvements. Yet, as a “nation,” China’s participation in the Cold War could take place only after the divisive conditions of China ended in 1949 and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) replaced the Republic of China (ROC) in the Asian mainland. Tibet, in the Chinese mind an ethnic frontier region, can be considered a separate case from the rest of China because its political incorporation and integration into the “Chinese Nation” took the whole first decade of the PRC. The case of Tibet illustrates the complex entanglement between the Cold War and some historic confrontations that began much earlier than the superpower contest.²

A COLD WAR MOMENT?

In October 1950, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) crossed two rivers. One was the Yalu River in Northeast Asia that demarcated the international border between China and Korea, and the other was the Jinsha River (Dri Chu in Tibetan) in Southwest China which until then had separated the political domains of the Chinese and the Tibetan authorities. Ever since, historians have consensually accepted the Yalu crossing as a key event in the Cold War history, whereas the Jinsha crossing has continued to generate various interpretations. Historians’ contentions can often be traced back to the diverged views of those who were contemporaneous to the historical events in question. The following are some examples regarding the Jinsha crossing of 1950.

As China’s wartime ally in World War II, the United States government upheld a stance supportive to China’s political unity and territorial integrity. In the meantime, in China’s territorial disputes with Great Britain and the Soviet Union — the other two members of the Grand Alliance — Washington avoided making a principled commitment to any side’s claims for the sake of maintaining operative expedience. This was the case for the prolonged British-Chinese-Tibetan contest along the Himalayas. In the late 1940s, however, a consensus emerged among American officials: American policy should treat Tibet as a separate area from China and should assume responsibility there in order to prevent Soviet expansion

² The summer of 2006 issue of *Journal of Cold War Studies* (vol. 8, no. 3) is devoted to considering the positions of Tibet and South Asia in the Cold War. The articles by Chen Jian, Michael Sheng, and Zhai Qiang are especially useful in illustrating the Tibetan policy of the Chinese Communist Party. This paper uses information missed by or unavailable to these articles and problematizes the relationship between Tibet and the Cold War.

in Central Asia.³ This consideration led to the US government's secret communications with Lhasa, efforts to funnel arms into Tibet, and diplomacy at the United Nations seeking support for Lhasa's claim of independence. If the newly independent Indian government could be convinced of the merit of these steps, then the "new crest" of containment against Communist China in the western Pacific would grow into a horseshoe-shaped encirclement connecting the Pacific and Central Asia.⁴ Although New Delhi was not convinced at the time, the US government went ahead with its Cold War orientation in Tibet and in the mid-1950s began to make preparations for a secret war against Beijing in the Tibetan Plateau.

Unwilling to jump into any side's bandwagon in the Cold War, the Indian leader Jawaharlal Nehru especially refused to "align ourselves with anybody in regard to China."⁵ Shortly after the PRC was established, Nehru told American leaders what was happening in China was an agrarian revolution of many decades old, and that Chinese nationalism would certainly resurface as a governing force there.⁶ Although hoping to maintain Tibet's aloofness from China, Nehru did not believe the New China was aggressive by nature. Instead, he was more afraid that Washington's meddling in the Tibetan affairs would provoke Beijing and worsen the Tibetan situation. Therefore, in late 1950 and early 1951, when American officials asked what the United States could do to help the Tibetan situation, Nehru repeatedly professed that the best course of action for Washington was to do nothing and to say little.⁷

Nehru's "southern" perspective also showed in his attitude toward the events inside Tibet. In the summer of 1949, after the Tibetan authorities expelled Chinese Nationalist Government personnel stationed in Lhasa, Nehru was not convinced that the act was a preemptive move against the Chinese Communists, as the Tibetans claimed. While conceding that the Tibetans should decide what to do to

³ American embassy in New Delhi to the Secretary of State, December 3, 1946, 711.93Tibet/12-346, Central Files of the State Department, The National Archives II of the United States, College Park, Maryland (hereafter CFSD); American embassy in Nanjing to the Secretary of State, January 1, 1947, 711.93Tibet/1-147, 1, 46-49, CFSD; CIA report SR-8, Appendix J, "Tibet," December 12, 1948, Harry S. Truman Papers: Secretary Files, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri; American embassy in Moscow to the Secretary of State, June 4, 1949, 893.00Tibet/6-449, CFSD; American embassy in Nanjing to the Secretary of State, July 8, 1949, 711.93Tibet/7-849, CFSD; State Department to the American embassy in New Delhi, December 9, 1949, 893.00Tibet/12-949, CFSD.

⁴ Acheson to the American embassy in New Delhi, January 12, 1950, 793B.02/1-1250, CFSD; conversation between Clubb and Graves, July 24, 1950, Record of Office of Chinese Affairs (hereafter ROCA); Acheson to the U.S. delegation to the United Nations, January 18, 1951, ROCA; Acheson to American embassy in New Delhi, June 2, 1951, 793B.00/5-2951, CFSD; memo by Strong, "Documents on Policies toward Tibet," January 31, 1951, ROCA.

⁵ Note by Jawaharlal Nehru, "Stand on China," June 15, 1949, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 11: 389.

⁶ "Record of Talk with President Truman," October 13, 1949, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, 13: 299.

⁷ Henderson to Secretary of State, November 3, 1950, 793B.00/11-350; memo on the conversation between McGhee and Nehru, March 8, 1951, McGhee Papers.

serve their own interests, Nehru viewed the wholesale expulsion of the Chinese officials from Lhasa as an anti-Chinese rather than an anti-Communist move.⁸

If American officials of the postwar era were eager to apply their Cold War perceptions to this remote frontier region, then other Westerners who arrived in the area earlier evaluated the Chinese Communist advance into Tibet in the context of a much older “European” discourse than the Cold War. In June 1950, E. E. Beatty, a Scottish missionary of the China Inland Mission, left Kangding after he was stationed there for decades without being able to advance westward into Tibet. Back in England, he wrote in the December issue of *China’s Millions*, the mission’s journal for China:

The armies of China may be used of God to break the tyrannical yoke of taxation with which Tibetan temples throughout the centuries have burdened the life of the Tibetan people from birth to death. [...] Today the armies of Communist workmen are building a motor road across Tibet on which ten-wheel trucks already are moving toward Tibet’s capital, Lhasa. We believe, hope and pray that this road, in the wisdom and power of God, will become a way of advance for those who proclaim the Christian gospel and way of life.⁹

One more example to include is the Chinese Nationalist Government settling in Taiwan after 1949. By this time, it was already commonplace for the Kuomintang (KMT) regime to view the CCP as a policy instrument of Moscow. Similarly, the CCP leadership named the KMT as a “running dog” of American imperialism. After the PLA invaded Tibet, the KMT regime readily viewed the event as a step to implement a Soviet imperialist conspiracy that had been in preparation since Lenin’s time.¹⁰ This perception was, however, not completely identical with Washington’s Cold War globalism and was qualified by the KMT’s own “southern” stance. In November 1950, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the KMT government deliberated its attitude toward Lhasa’s effort in the United Nations. It contended that, since Tibet was under China’s sovereignty and therefore no different from any other Chinese provinces now occupied by the CCP, any protest against this “new step of Soviet aggression” should not be a separate Tibetan move but a part of the KMT government’s general complaints against the Soviet Union in the UN.¹¹

AN OLD WAR

Denying Tibetan agency in the international scene, the KMT was a long-term adversary of Lhasa. It had passed the role to the CCP in the continent just recently. At the beginning of the ROC, Sun Yat-sen proclaimed the Nationalist goal of

⁸ Nehru’s cable to Harishwar Dayal, Political Officer in Sikkim, July 26, 1949, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, 12: 411.

⁹ E.E. Beatty, “Tibet: A Notable Observation,” *China’s Millions*, December 1950, 125-6.

¹⁰ Investigation Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Administration, “Summary of the Process of the Communist Bandits’ Invasion of Tibet,” September 20, 1951, Files of the Asian-Pacific Department, Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taipei.

¹¹ Wang Shijie to Chiang Kai-shek, November 18, 1950, volume 15 of Specially Submitted Files: Diplomacy: Diplomacy at the United Nations, Archives of President Jiang Zhongzheng (Chiang Kai-shek) (hereafter APJZ).

unifying the "five races" bequeathed by the Qing Dynasty into a *Zhonghua Minzu* (Chinese Nation). Since then, the KMT authorities had endeavored to realign estranged Tibet and Outer Mongolia with China. By the end of World War II, it became clear that the case of Outer Mongolia was a lost battle. In the summer of 1945, in making its last and fateful diplomatic effort of the war years, the KMT government negotiated with the Soviets and agreed to legalize Outer Mongolia's de facto independence that had been standing for more than two decades. The situation of Tibet still seemed hopeful, though. Unlike the case of Outer Mongolia, the KMT government never lost contact with the Tibetan authorities. Since the 1930s, the KMT government had even managed to maintain a political presence in Lhasa through its representatives there. The question faced by KMT leaders was, positively, how to augment this meager liaison into a symbol of Chinese sovereignty, if not actual control, and, negatively, how to prevent Tibet from hardening its alienation from China by seeking international support to its separate statehood.

China's so-called impasse of development in modern times involved not just difficult choices about forms of government and modes of economy but also a confused and contested process of resetting China's international persona. Since the mid-Nineteenth Century, pressured by the overwhelming international-cum-Western system, China had transformed from a dynastic empire into a national state. Unlike in the color-coded era of the Cold War when China got the "red" denominator in international politics, until 1949 the transformation of China's international persona mainly involved its participation in world affairs as a "nation" and the delimitation of its geo-body as a "nation-state." This was China's international struggle for status and shape.

Therefore, the KMT government's Tibetan predicament during a two-decade stretch had its roots in China's pre-1911 history. During their nearly three-century rule of China, the Manchu emperors gingerly managed the internal and frontier securities of their dynastic state and created a huge empire of five geo- and ethnographic domains that were intricately and dynamically intertwined with one another. After the Western-Chinese encounter began in the mid-Nineteenth Century, modern transformation of Chinese territoriality was underway, which eventually not only reshaped the outer limitations of the Qing Empire but also reconfigured its inner components. At the eve of the Qing Dynasty's demise, Manchuria, Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet still retained many of their frontier features vis-a-vis China proper. In the meantime, the Qing Empire achieved a certain "national" characteristics by subscribing willingly or reluctantly to the norms of modern international relations. Committed to keeping the begonia leaf-shaped territorial domain bequeathed by the Qing Dynasty, the KMT government viewed Manchuria, Outer Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet as the "first lines" of China's national defense. The "highest goal" of the KMT frontier administration was therefore to amalgamate all these territories and their peoples with the Han people of China into a "new nation just like the nation of the United States."¹²

¹² Wu Zhongxin to the Executive Yuan, August 4, 1939, *Shisan Shi Dalai Lama Yuanji Zhiji he Shisi Shi Dalai Lama Zuochuang Dang'an* (Selected archives on the condolence mission about the death of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and the reincarnation and enthronement of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama), the Chinese Center of Tibetan Studies and the Second Historical Archives of China, comp. (Beijing: Zhongguo zangxue chubanshe, 1990), 233-8; Wu Zhongxin to Chiang Kai-shek, August 1939, volume 63 of Specially Submitted Files: Political: General Frontier Administration, APJZ.

This enterprise was, however, more literary than practical in translating the Qing Empire into a Chinese national state. When contemplating a concrete model for the relationship between Tibet and the KMT's "central government," KMT officials did not have any new organizational formula but proposed a preferred solution in granting Tibet "high-degree autonomy" modeled on the practices of the Qing Empire at its height, or the late years of Emperor Qianlong.¹³ When bringing back these imperial practices by simply renaming them as "national," the Chinese Nationalists could not really construct a "new" Chinese nation. Chiang Kai-shek understood the weakness of the nationalist discourse and ordered the KMT apparatuses to reset the entire narrative of Chinese history in a nationalist tune. Shortly after the publication of his notorious book, *China's Destiny*, Chiang issued a directive on the "questions of nation and frontier" to KMT officials in charge of education, propaganda, and frontier administration, emphasizing:

The so-called four barbarians and four descendants in the ancient time were all offspring of the Red and Yellow Emperors, just like the Manchus, Mongols, Hui, and Tibetans in the modern time. The key is that they were [and are] all part of the Chinese Nation.¹⁴

Such a "Chinese Nation" constructed with the party ideology was ridiculed as pretentious by foreign observers. In World War II, China engaged Japan in a life-and-death struggle, and the "Chinese Nation" was the dominant theme in China's wartime political discourse. Yet, Tibet, Outer Mongolia, and a separatist "Eastern Turkestan Republic" in Xinjiang after 1944 continued to challenge the very idea of the Chinese Nation. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs admitted that Chinese sovereignty in Tibet was problematic in both international and domestic politics. Diplomatically, the British government only recognized Chinese "suzerainty" in Tibet, and, internally, "the orders and laws of the central [KMT] government have never been able to reach Tibet."¹⁵ Such a bifurcated problem of sovereignty also caused a smothered dispute between the Foreign Ministry and the Mongolian-Tibetan Affairs Commission about whether a solution to the Tibetan question should begin with diplomacy with the British or with "domestic" maneuvering with the Tibetans.¹⁶ Chiang Kai-shek, however,

¹³ Shi Qingyang to Chiang Kai-shek, "Plan for settling the unsettled Tibetan case," 1933, volume 58 of Specially Submitted Files: Political: Tibetan Question, APJZ; Huang Musong to the Executive Yuan, October 8, 1934, *Shisan Shi Dalai Lama Yuanji Zhiji he Shisi Shi Dalai Lama Zuochuang Dang'an*, p. 81.

¹⁴ "Chairman of the Committee's [Chiang Kai-shek] four-point directive on the questions of nation and frontier," August 27, 1943, Executive Yuan Archives.

¹⁵ Information about the Tibetan-British collusion submitted by the Department of Europe to the Tibetan affairs conference, November, 1944, *Waijiaobu Dang'an Congshu: Jiewu Lei; Di Wu Ce: Xizang Juan I* (Archival series of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: border administrations; book five: Tibet, volume 1), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, comp. (Taipei: Waijiaobu, 2005), pp. 320-22.

¹⁶ Information about the Tibetan-British collusion submitted by the Department of Europe to the Tibetan affairs conference, November, 1944, *Waijiaobu Dang'an Congshu: Jiewu Lei; Di Wu Ce: Xizang Juan I*, 320-22; Shen Zonglian to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 24, 1946, *ibid.*, pp. 79-81.

saw military force as the crux of any meaningful policy to deal with the issue. In 1942, he personally outlined several military steps to force Lhasa to relent.¹⁷ In the fall of 1950, a year after driving the KMT regime to Taiwan, the People's Liberation Army advanced into Tibet as if implementing Chiang's 1942 plan.

Clearly, until ousted from the mainland, the KMT government viewed the British influence in Tibet and the Tibetan government separately as external and internal obstacles to its policy goals regarding Tibet. After the Tibetan authorities used Communist threat as an excuse to expel KMT personnel from Lhasa in July 1949, Chiang Kai-shek did not harbor any empathy toward Lhasa's "anti-Communist" sentiment. Instead, he condemned the act as treason and suggested that the Chinese government coerce Lhasa to repent with a threat of "stern sanctions."¹⁸ In the early 1950s, therefore, when the KMT government in Taiwan condemned the PLA invasion of Tibet as part of a Soviet conspiracy, the line had no history as far as Tibet was concerned.

Contending for power in China for nearly three decades, as of 1949 the Chinese Communists' stance on the Tibetan question had undergone several stages. The party's fluid geostrategic position and China's changing international environment were among the most important factors that affected the CCP's general attitude toward China's ethnic frontiers. Suffice to say, by the end of World War II, the CCP was no longer a marginal force invoking the Leninist doctrine of national self-determination and inviting ethnic minorities to rebel against the ruling center of China. By now, it was one of the two power centers in China seeking to restore China's "grand unification." At the time, the CCP's definition of the "Chinese Nation" was almost identical with the KMT's.¹⁹

The CCP's hitherto relationship with Tibet was full of twists and turns. In the mid-1930s, when the CCP embarked on the Long March from southeastern China, Tibet was one of the ethnic frontiers that the Red Army encountered. At the time, CCP leaders viewed Tibet as a direction to avoid, or a "road to ruins," according to Mao Zedong.²⁰ In the late 1940s, when the CCP was sweeping China from the northeast to the southwest, Tibet stood as the last region in the continent for the PLA to conquer. By the end of 1949, Mao named Tibet, along

¹⁷ Chiang Kai-shek to Xu Yongchang, October 19, 1942, Hand-Written Files 15353, APJZ.

¹⁸ Chiang Kai-shek to Li Zongren, July 30 1949, volume 39 of "Revolutionary Documents": Political: Frontier Administration, APJZ.

¹⁹ I have discussed the trajectory of the CCP's ethno-political stance from 1921 to 1945 in *Frontier Passages: Ethnopolitics and the Rise of Chinese Communism, 1921-1945* (Washington, D.C. and Stanford: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 2004).

²⁰ "The CCP Central Committee's letter to comrades for the implementation of the northward orientation," September 10, 1935, *Zhongguo Gongnong Hongjun Di Si Fangfianjun Zhanshi Ziliao Xuanbian: Changzheng Shiqi* (Selected materials on the combat history of the fourth front army of the Chinese workers' and peasants' red army: the long march period), Compiling Committee on the Combat History of the Fourth Front Army of the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, comp. (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1992), p. 146.

with Taiwan and the Hainan Island, as a territory that must be “liberated” in order to “eliminate the last remnants of the Chiang Kai-shek bandits, to complete the cause of unifying China, and to deny the aggressive force of American imperialism any foothold in our territories.”²¹ Thus, in one stroke, Mao made Tibet a battleground for three “wars” — the oldest one over the geo-body of the Chinese Nation, the recent one over the political destiny of the Chinese society, and the newest one over the international alignment of the Chinese state, or the Cold War.

Mao, however, had entertained this perception of Tibet for just a few months. During the Chinese Civil War, the CCP leadership determined the priorities of China’s areas according to their relevance to the party’s military-political advance. Therefore, Tibet did not become an item on the CCP agenda until the early months of 1949. In January and February 1949, Soviet leader Anastas Mikoyan made a secret trip to Xibaipo, Hebei, and held several lengthy conversations with CCP leaders. During one of these conversations, Mao revealed to Mikoyan his thinking about Tibet:

We are prepared to grant autonomy to the Tibetan people residing in southwestern China. The Tibetan question is extremely complicated. In practice Tibet is a British colony and belongs to China only in name. Lately the United States has spared no effort to ingratiate itself with the Tibetan people. [...] Once we end the civil war and begin to deal with political issues at home and when the Tibetan people can see that we do not threaten them with aggression and treat them equally, we then can begin to decide the destiny of the region. We must be cautious and patient in dealing with Tibet, and we have to take account of the complex and troublesome religious affairs and the influence of Lamaism there.²²

So far as available information can show, this is the earliest reference to Tibet made by a top CCP leader during the Chinese Civil War. The same words could have been said by an official of the KMT government’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, except that KMT officials would not go so far in calling Tibet a British colony and would not be as annoyed by American interest in Tibet. At this point, obviously, the CCP was preparing itself for solving the Tibetan question as one inherited from the KMT regime. In Mao’s discussion, the main obstacles remained the vestige of British influence, the general Tibetan suspicion of the Chinese, and the

²¹ “Mao Zedong’s statement to the troops in the fronts and the compatriots of the entire country, December 31, 1949,” *Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Di Er Yezhanjun Zhanshi; Di Er Juan: Jiefang Zhanzheng Shiqi* (Combat history of the second field army of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army; volume 2: the period of the war of liberation), Compiling Committee on the Combat History of the Second Field Army of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army, comp. (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1990) 321.

²² Mikoyan’s memo on his conversation with Mao Zedong about urgent policy issues, February 6, 1949, SD16476, Soviet Archives, Center of Modern Chinese Historical Research, Beijing.

particularities of the Tibetan theocracy. The American factor was secondary, and "Chiang Kai-shek bandits" were not even mentioned. In other words, in early 1949, Mao considered the Tibetan question in the frame of the "old war" waged by the KMT regime for decades, not in that of the winding-down civil war between the CCP and the KMT or that of the burgeoning confrontation between the CCP and the United States.

In the next six months, in their secret communications with Moscow and public statements within China, CCP leaders continued to treat Tibet as a unique issue. Two features stood out in the CCP discourse about Tibet during this period: first, a solution to the Tibetan question would not be part of the current war against the KMT regime but a separate "political" step; second, the CCP would not deal with the Tibetan question until the PLA took over the Hainan Island and Taiwan.²³

A GROUND FOR SEVERAL WARS

The CCP's conceptual insulation of Tibet from its "war of liberation" and international struggle against "American imperialism" ended in September 1949. The event causing this change was the Tibetan authorities' expulsion of the KMT personnel plus a number of Han Chinese from Tibet in July. The CCP's reaction to the frontier event came belatedly. Weeks after the "incident of expelling the Han," as the event was called in China, in communicating with Stalin, Mao still followed the original line of thinking and indicated that the PLA would attack Taiwan during the second half of 1950 while Tibet would remain beyond the CCP control.²⁴ Not until September 2 did the CCP publicly react to the July incident in an editorial by the Xinhua News Agency. The editorial named "British and American imperialism and their follower, the Nehru government of India" as co-conspirators who incited the Tibetan authorities to drive the KMT personnel out. While the "British and Indian aggressors" were severely censured for involving themselves in this "extremely dangerous and foolish undertaking," "American imperialism" received the lion's share of the blame:

This plot falls into the same pattern as the recent conspiracy of American imperialism aimed at annexing Taiwan. [...] Since the end of World War II American imperialism actively planned for aggression against Tibet.

²³ Mao Zedong's message to Stalin, June 14, 1949, SD16525; Liu Shaoqi, "Report to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party and Stalin on behalf of the CCP Central Committee, July 4, 1949," Liu Shaoqi, *Jianguo Yilai Liu Shaoqi Wengao* (Liu Shaoqi's manuscripts since the foundation of the state) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1998), 1: 1-2; Mao Zedong's cable to Stalin, July 25, 1949, SD00601; Zhou Enlai, "Outline for the speech at the national working conference of the trade unions, July 1949," *Jianguo Yilai Zhou Enlai Wengao* (Zhou Enlai's manuscripts since the foundation of the state) (Beijing: Zhongyang Wenxian Chubanshe, 2008) 1:155. An often cited source on Mao Zedong's talks with Mikoyan, Shi Zhe's *Zai Lishi Juren Shenbian: Shi Zhe Huiyilu* (At the side of historical giants: Shi Zhe's memoirs) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1991), 374-385, has been used by some studies to show that Mao saw Tibet as part of the "war of liberation." Now that the Soviet records of these conversations are available, the accuracy of Shi Zhe's recollections can be checked. The impression that in February 1949 Mao treated Tibet as part of the "war of liberation" is proved misleading.

²⁴ Mao Zedong's cable to Stalin, July 25, 1949, SD00601.

American imperialism sent spies to Tibet and attempted to gain practical control of Tibet through certain upper-stratus Tibetans.

The editorial also included Tibet into the “war of liberation” for the first time, stating that the PLA must liberate Tibet as well as other not-yet-liberated territories of China, and that “not a single inch of land will be allowed to remain outside the rule of the People’s Republic of China.”²⁵

Decades later, Hu Qiaomu, who was Xinhua’s chief editor at the time, recalled that after October 1948 all important reports and writings of the agency were sent to Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, and sometimes Mao, for approval. Some of the most important pieces were actually drafted by Mao himself. In 1949, Mao wrote thirteen articles for Xinhua, including one written on August 30 that blasted American aggression against China since the Opium War. The editorial above was not one of the thirteen.²⁶ The *nianpu* 年谱 (chronicles of life) of Mao, Liu, and Zhou published in China cannot provide any information about these leaders’ relationship with the editorial, though one of them must have approved the editorial in view of its importance. In view of the division of labor among the top CCP leaders, Liu Shaoqi was probably the one.²⁷

Circumstantial evidence, however, suggests that at the time the CCP leadership was in a bind to ascertain the nature of the delicate Tibetan situation. A few days after the Xinhua editorial was published, Zhou Enlai told the participants of the People’s Political Consultative Conference that, to fend off imperialist plots against China’s unification, the PRC would implement the principle of “national autonomy” but not that of “national self-determination” in handling the question of ethnic minorities. As examples of such plots, Zhou mentioned the British conspiracies in Xinjiang and Tibet and the American conspiracies toward Taiwan and the Hainan Island.²⁸ The discrepancy between Zhou’s and the Xinhua News Agency’s references to the relationship between American imperialism and Tibet was left unexplained. Mao simply omitted the matter in his public speeches at the time. Late in the month, when making his famous speech, “The Chinese People Stood Up,” Mao listed a series of territories yet to be liberated by the PLA. As far as Tibet was concerned, Mao did not use the occasion to blast the most recent

²⁵ “Foreign aggressors must not be allowed to annex the Chinese territory—Tibet, September 2, 1949,” *Mizu Wenti Wenxian Huibian, 1927-1949* (Documents on the nationality question, 1927-1949), United Front Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, comp. (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1991), pp. 1262-4.

²⁶ Hu Qiaomu, *Hu Qiaomu Huiyi Mao Zedong* (Mao Zedong as remembered by Hu Qiaomu) (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1994) p. 464, pp. 471-3.

²⁷ “Division of labor in the secretariat of the CCP Central Committee, 1949,” in *Jianguo Yilai Zhou Enlai Wengao*, 1: 740-1, indicates that among other things, Liu Shaoqi was assigned the responsibility for the party’s propaganda department and the editorial office of the Xinhua agency. Zhou Enlai was then in charge of foreign affairs and the party’s work of united front, and, therefore, it is likely that he may also have reviewed the editorial before its publication.

²⁸ Zhou Enlai, “A few issues in respect to the People’s Political Consultative Conference, September 7, 1949,” *Zhongguo Gongchandang Xizang Lishi Dashiji, 1949-2004* (Chronicle of important events of the Chinese Communist Party in Tibet, 1949-2009), Office of Party History Research of the Chinese Communist Party Committee of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, comp. (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2005), 1: 3.

"imperialist conspiracy" there — he did not mention the territory at all.²⁹ Mao's silence on Tibet, however, may have been louder than any words about the territory voiced at the time.

It is likely that by the time of the Xinhua editorial the CCP leadership had already learned about a visit to Tibet made by the American journalist Lowell Thomas and his son in August 1949. Thomas' visit may therefore have served as a factual basis for the Xinhua News Agency's accusation against Washington's meddling in the Tibetan affairs.³⁰ Nevertheless, historical archives have yet to produce any evidence that Beijing had any knowledge about the American-Tibetan contacts before and after the July incident. Actually, Beijing may not have gotten first-hand intelligence about Western presence in Tibet until the PLA took Chamdo in October 1950, which included some photos of the two Thomas' taken during their visit.³¹ Neither was the Soviet Union able to provide Beijing with any intelligence on Tibet. At the time, Stalin focused his attention on the situation of Xinjiang. In June, Stalin repeatedly urged the CCP to speed up its military advance toward Xinjiang with information about possible "British interference in the affairs of Xinjiang."³² Many years later, historians still could not agree whether the July incident was incited by British influence or initiated by the Tibetan government itself.³³ The question as to Beijing's knowledge about and estimation of the incident when it happened is even more difficult due to lack of information. Circumstantial evidence suggests, however, despite using the Xinhua editorial to fit the incident into Beijing's anti-American propaganda at the time, CCP leaders remained cautious about the Tibetan situation in public. An interesting counter-factual question is how Beijing would have reacted to the incident if Lhasa had not

²⁹ Mao Zedong, "The Chinese people stood up! September 21, 1949," *Jianguo Yilai Mao Zedong Wengao* (Mao Zedong's manuscripts since the foundation of the state) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1987), 1:4.

³⁰ The CCP could at least learn from a report by the Kuomintang's *Zhongyang Ribao* (Central daily news), dated August 14, 1949, that the senior and junior Thomas were about to enter Tibet.

³¹ Zhang Xianmikng, *Zhang Xianming 55 nian Xizang Gongzuo Shilu* (Records of Zhang Xiangming's 55-year work in Tibet) (unpublished internal materials, 2006), 21-22. Chen Xizhang, acting chief of the KMT office in Lhasa when the expulsion took place, reached Beijing in August 1950 via Hong Kong. He of course could be the most authoritative source to brief the CCP leadership about the situation of Tibet in 1949, but he was one year too late.

³² Stalin's cable to Mao Zedong via Kovalev, June 18, 1949, SD16527; summary of Stalin's conversation with the CCP delegation, June 27, 1949, SD00598.

³³ Studies that have access to the Tibetan sources disagree about who was the originator of the expulsion idea. Tsering Shakya's *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet since 1947* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 9, cites some former Tibetan officials in identifying Hugh Richardson, a British national in charge of Indian mission in Lhasa, as the one who suggested the idea to the Tibetan authorities. Melvyn Goldstein's *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 613, cites a different Tibetan informant in identifying Ngapo Ngawang Jime, who was then a chief assistant to the top office of the Tibetan government, the Kashag, as the original author of the idea. In the years to come Ngapo would play a key role in the Tibetan-Beijing collaboration. The most recent edition of *Zhongguo Gongchandang Xizang Lishi Dashiji, 1949-2004* (2005 edition), 1: 2, is emphatic that the 1949 incident was "planned single-handedly" by a "British national Richardson."

invoked anti-Communism, one of the most contentious themes in international politics at the time.

In its formal message to the KMT government, dated July 8, the Tibetan authorities explained its act: "In China the Kuomintang and the Communists are fighting a war. Communism and chaos may happen to all the locations where Chinese officials and government agencies exist. We therefore cannot allow the Chinese representative in Lhasa to take such a risk, [...] The Tibetan people are worried that evil Communism may enter Tibet, the source of all living creatures and the holy land of Buddhism."³⁴ Under this anticommunist reasoning, the Tibetan authorities easily removed the symbolic presence of the KMT government from Lhasa. Had leaders in Lhasa hoped to thereby prevent or at least postpone the Chinese Communists' action against Tibet, they miscalculated. The act just provoked Beijing to speed up its plan to take over Tibet. Later, Tibetan officials must have had second thoughts about their choice of words. In late 1949 and early 1950, when asking the CCP leadership not to send the PLA into Tibet, Lhasa made a protestation that Tibet was a "land cultivated by Avalokitesvara [*guanyin* 观音 in Chinese]," had always maintained its independence, and did not harbor grudge against any people or country.³⁵

In retrospect, under the international circumstances of the time, factual niceties of an event did not seem to matter as much as the color it was painted. The anticommunist undertone of the July incident allowed or caused the CCP leadership to connect Tibet to its own ongoing international struggle. In mid-1949, Mao described China's international position this way: if imperialism was viewed as a lion, currently the head and body of the lion were already pinned down by the powerful revolutionary force of the Soviet Union and the new democratic countries of East Europe; in the meantime the CCP caught the tail of the lion and was cutting it off so that the strength of the lion's head would be weakened.³⁶ Stalin agreed with Mao about the Euro-American connection of the Chinese revolution, reminding Mao that Great Britain, France, and the United States understood this significance as well for the PLA's march toward China's borders with Indochina, Burma, and India would stir up revolutionary crises in these countries and even in Indonesia and the Philippines. These imperialist countries therefore would spare no effort to block the PLA's way in order to keep southern China under their influence.³⁷ Informed by this general judgment, the CCP leadership could derive enough reasons from the July incident to reconsider its original thinking about how and when the Tibetan question should be solved.

³⁴ *Heping Jiafang Xizang* (Peaceful liberation of Tibet), Committees on Collection of Materials on Party History of the Tibetan Autonomous Region and Tibetan Military District, comp. (Lhasa: Xizang remin chubanshe, 1995) pp. 209-212.

³⁵ Tibetan bureau of foreign affairs to Mao Zedong, November 2, 1949, *Heping Jiefang Xizang*, p. 241.

³⁶ Kovalev's report to Stalin on his conversation with Mao Zedong, May 17, 1949, SD16516.

³⁷ Stalin's cable to Mao Zedong via Kovalev, May 26, 1949, SD16522.

On October 10, 1949, Mao Zedong cabled Wang Zhen, commander of the First Army Corps of the First Field Army: "The task of your military advance includes marching into Tibet and liberating northern Tibet."³⁸ This is the first known evidence that Mao included Tibet into the operational plan of the PLA and hence made Tibet part of the "war of liberation" waged by the CCP. The time for solving the Tibetan question was also moved up. In mid-November and early December, Zhou Enlai talked twice with Soviet Ambassador Nikolai Roshchin. On these occasions, Zhou indicated that the PLA planned to eliminate KMT forces in Sichuan in January 1950. After Sichuan and Sikang were liberated, the PLA would immediately enter Tibet. In the meantime, the PLA's landing in the Hainan Island was planned for March, and the offensive for liberating Taiwan was planned for the summer of 1950. Zhou remarked that the battles for Tibet and the Hainan Island would be easy, but the one for Taiwan could be very difficult.³⁹ The hitherto unhurriedness in CCP leaders' deliberation about the Tibetan question was thus replaced by a sense of urgency.

Until relevant information emerges from archives of China, one can only speculate the concrete policy considerations behind CCP leaders' decision to change the originally unhurried and mainly political orientation toward Tibet into an immediate plan for military operations. Beijing's reaction to the July incident, as reflected in the Xinhua editorial, shows what may have caused the change of mind. On the other hand, the editorial's accusation of "imperialist plots" may not have been convincing even to CCP leaders themselves. As of now, only a mysterious document attributed to Mao may shed some light on the real reason for Beijing's reorientation in late 1949.

In early December, Mao was traveling by train to Moscow to hold a historic meeting with Stalin. On December 9, before crossing the borderline, the train stopped briefly in Manzhouli to change bogies. Allegedly, during this short stop at Manzhouli, Mao sent a letter to the CCP Central Committee and the Southwestern Bureau. Mao's train left Beijing at 2:30 a.m. on December 6 and entered the Soviet territory at 4:00 p.m. on December 9. It took 60 hours and 9 minutes for the train to travel from Beijing to Manzhouli, which means that Mao arrived at Manzhouli around 2:30 p.m. on December 9. Therefore, he either wrote the letter during the one and a half hours he spent in Manzhouli or already had the letter ready before he arrived there.⁴⁰

Since the military approach to deal with Tibet and a rough schedule had already been communicated to the Soviet government a month before, Mao's letter seems to have been intended to remove any remaining hesitation or disagreement in the CCP leadership about the new line of action. The letter, in its paraphrased version, adopted a tone of persuasion:

Since both India and the United States were making plans about Tibet, determination on liberation of Tibet should now be made. "An early

³⁸ Mao Zedong to Wang Zhen, October 10, 1949, *Zhongguo Gongchandang Xizang Lishi Dashiji*, 1: 4.

³⁹ Roshchin's memo on his conversation with Zhou Enlai, November 15, 1949, SD09845; Roshchin's memo on his conversation with Zhou Enlai, December 5, 1949, SD16567.

⁴⁰ *Jianguo Yilai Zhou Enlai Wengao*, 1: 506-7, 557.

military advance into Tibet is better than a late one lest long delay invite troubles [ye chang meng duo 夜长梦多, or literally, a long night causes more bad dreams].”

Mao's letter will remain mysterious because, allegedly, the original copy of the letter and the CCP Central Committee's cable transmitting its content to the Southwest Bureau are both lost. Based on the recollections of some senior officers of the 18th Army many years later, in mid-January of 1950, Liu Bochen and Deng Xiaoping conveyed the content of Mao's letter to the leading officers of the 18th Army that was given the task of advancing into Tibet. Thus, Mao's letter, orally relayed and reconstructed over the years, cannot reappear in an authentic form. Discrepancies about the date and wording of the letter exist in the official and semi-official Chinese publications that brought the letter to light in 2005.⁴¹

Although the authenticity and details of Mao's letter cannot be independently verified, the letter does seem to constitute a sensible link in the chain of CCP documents concerning Tibet. Based on information available so far, a number of points about the letter can be made. First, the letter provided the most authoritative statement of the CCP leadership on the reason for changing the original plan regarding Tibet. From now on the high priority of Tibet and the necessity to use force became fixed “determinations” in the CCP policy and must be implemented. Secondly, the letter, as senior officers of the 18th Army recalled, served as an operational directive that set the CCP Southwestern Bureau in motion to make preparations for military advance into Tibet.⁴² Originally, Mao asked the First Field Army and the Northwestern Bureau under Peng Dehuai to assume the main responsibility for occupying Tibet from the direction of Qinghai. In the meantime, the Southwestern Bureau would coordinate the action from Sichuan and Xikang. This was the content of a long cable Mao sent to Peng in late November.⁴³ It is therefore odd that Mao sent his December 9 letter to the CCP Central Committee and the Southwestern Bureau but not the Northwestern Bureau, as if he anticipated that Peng would decline his Tibetan assignment. Indeed, on December 30, Peng cabled Mao and listed difficulties for the PLA to enter Tibet from the directions of Xinjiang and Qinghai.⁴⁴ Three days later, Mao

⁴¹ Mao Zedong's letter to the CCP Central Committee and the Southwestern Bureau, December 9, 1949, *Zhongguo Gongchandang Xizang Lishi Dashiji*, 1: 5, gives the most authoritative version about the facts around the letter. Jiangbian Jiacao, *Li Jue Zhuan* (Biography of Li Jue) (Beijing: Zhongguo zangxue chubanshe, 2005) 49-50, indicates that Li Jue, then head of the operational department of the Second Field Army under Liu Bochen and Deng Xiaoping, personally saw the letter in 1949 and was the key figure to add the episode to the history of PLA's advance into Tibet more than four decades later.

⁴² *Li Jue Zhuan*, 49-50; *Zhongguo Gongchandang Xizang Lishi Dashiji*, 1: 9.

⁴³ Mao Zedong to Pengdehuai, November 23, 1949, *Jianguo Yilai Mao Zedong Wengao*, 1:152.

⁴⁴ Peng Dehuai to the CCP Central Committee and Mao Zedong, December 30, 1949, Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong Xizang Gongzuo Wenxuan* (Selected writings of Mao Zedong on the Tibetan work), 7, note 3.

in Moscow decided to give the main responsibility for Tibet to the Southwestern Bureau, which had already been alerted by Mao's December 9 letter.⁴⁵

Lastly, Mao's letter sheds light on CCP leaders' perspective at the time about the relationship between Tibet and the Cold War. Although the Xinhua editorial of September 2 made the United States sound like a culprit caught at the scene of a crime, the wording of Mao's letter indicates clearly that Mao did not see the planned PLA advance into Tibet as a countermeasure against an unfolding American plot. Rather, it was a preemptive step to prevent any possible foreign interference in Tibet. In his January 2 cable to the CCP Central Committee and the Northwestern and Southwestern Bureaus, Mao stated explicitly, "Even without a big population, Tibet occupies an extremely important international position. We must occupy the land and reform it into a new democratic Tibet."⁴⁶ Throughout the "war of liberation," no other territory was designated for "liberation" by the PLA, not even Taiwan, because of its "international" importance. Yet, Mao's highlighting of the international dimension of the Tibetan question should probably not be construed as seeing Tibet as a western front against the United States vis-a-vis the Taiwan Strait as an eastern front. For Mao and other CCP leaders, the "international position" of Tibet could mean China's geo-body shape in the direction of southwest Asia, a new Chinese-Indian relationship in the making, legitimacy of the PRC as a successor state to the ROC, extension of the Chinese Communist revolution to all territories claimed by China, integration of the Tibetan Plateau into the national defense, and so on, all at once. The Tibetan question, in other words, was one on which several temporalities converged.

CONCLUSION

In *The Resurgence of East Asia*, a group of leading scholars in East Asian studies propose that the trajectory of East Asian development be evaluated in three "temporalities," or three perspectives respectively covering 500 years, 150 years, and 50 years.⁴⁷ All historical processes have their own histories, and the multi-temporality approach can benefit all historical investigations. In this article, the three temporal perspectives for the Tibetan question in the mid-Twentieth Century are China's territoriality transformation since the mid-Nineteenth Century, the Chinese Revolution of the Twentieth Century, and the Cold War in the wake of World War II. These time frames, with the early 1950s as a point of historical evaluation, cover roughly 100, 40, and 4 or 5 years.

In the 100-year perspective, the Tibetan question was part of the modern transformation of Chinese territoriality resulting from the confrontation between the traditional East Asian inter-state relations culture and the modern-cum-Western international system. Tibet, along with the other Inner Asian frontiers of the Chinese Empire, became a target for political integration by the central government of China now trying to exist and behave like a "national" state.

⁴⁵ Mao Zedong to the CCP Central Committee, Peng Dehuai, Deng Xiaoping, Liu Bocheng, and He Long, January 2, 1950, *Jianguo Yilai Mao Zedong Wengao*, 1: 208-9.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Giovanni Arrighi, Takeshi Hamashita, and Mark Selden, eds., *The Resurgence of East Asia: 500, 150 and 50 Year Perspectives* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2003), pp. 2-4.

During the century, even slower than Chinese political elites in taking up the “national” essences of the modern world, the Tibetan leaders nevertheless wanted to maintain the ethnopolitical particularities of their land and put up a tenacious resistance against a succession of centralizing forces based in China proper. In 1949, the CCP was just the latest “central government” of China, tailing the Manchu court, the Beiyang clique, and the KMT government, that poised to complete the geo-body building of the modern Chinese state.

As of the mid-Twentieth Century, the Chinese Revolution, nearly four decades old, also entered a new phase. As a historical process, the Chinese Revolution reflected all the contradictions of the Chinese society that accumulated or became accentuated after the nineteenth-century Chinese-Western encounter. In the meantime, the Chinese Revolution was deeply infected by a second wave of Western impact: the struggle between Communism and Capitalism, or an ideological infighting of the Western world. Although sharing many items on China’s “national” agenda, political forces of twentieth-century China parted ways and wielded different ideas, many of which were imported from the West, in solving China’s problems. In dealing with Tibet as an outstanding problem for both Chinese territoriality and nationality, the “Chinese” commonality of the KMT and the CCP was obvious. Available information on the two parties’ Tibetan policies up to 1950 shows these identical elements: (1) Tibet was part of China; (2) the Tibetan question happened because of imperialist encroachment on Chinese sovereignty and the Tibetan authorities’ misjudgments; (3) the problem should be solved mainly with political means but military pressure was necessary; (4) some sort of regional autonomy should be established in Tibet to end its separation from China; (5) Tibetan religious and cultural practices would be retained but its political system must be changed for the sake of establishing the central government’s authority and control. The “partisan” particularities of the KMT and the CCP regarding Tibet were also easily recognizable. Their Tibetan policies had different international supporters and detractors. Holding power in China during different times, they faced different international and domestic circumstances and, consequently, their historical connections with Tibet and capabilities to deal with the problem differed. And their respective ideological stances in the Chinese Revolution meant different prospects for Tibet: the KMT expected to merge Tibet into a moderately modernized version of Chinese culture, whereas the CCP wanted Tibet to “advance” into “socialism” with the rest of China.

Thus, when the two superpowers began to wage their respective global missions to convert countries of the Third World either to the socialist or the capitalist mode of development, China had been on its arduous path of modernization-cum-Westernization for quite some time. In the late 1940s, the Cold War hit China as a third wave of Western impact and its featured bloc politics showed that the so-called West was now separated into two contending ideological-military camps. Deep in its own struggle for civilizational renewal, China, a quintessentially “Eastern” country, had been trying to catch up with the West and had been troubled by the question of taking sides in the intra-Western, Communism-versus-Capitalism contest long before the Cold War began. This time, China would again maneuver with the two sides of the Cold War but maintain its own path no matter which side was winning.

Therefore, to put the Tibetan question into the Cold War perspective is to check a small detail of a snapshot of China taken during one of the country's long jumps in history. In ascertaining American overt or covert intervention in Tibet or the CCP's preemptive or reactive measures for fending off such an intervention, one may argue that at a certain time or juncture Tibet entered the era of the Cold War. In the meantime, for obvious historical reasons, the Cold War cannot be the most important analytical frame for the Tibetan question even during the Cold War period. In his thoughtful lectures on how historians function, John Lewis Gaddis points out a useful "principle of diminishing relevance" for ranking the importance of various causes of a historical event that have different temporal distances from the event. That is, the closer a cause is time-wise in relation to an event, the more important that cause is.⁴⁸ The case of Tibet, however, seems a challenge to the principle.

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⁴⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 96.

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