

## Tibet's Struggle

"The Question of Tibet" by A. Tom Grunfeld, in *Current History* (Sept. 1999), 4225 Main St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19127.

The Hollywood-enhanced international campaign the Dalai Lama has been waging in Tibet's behalf since the mid-1980s "has clearly been a failure for those it was intended to help," contends Grunfeld, a historian at the State University of New York's Empire State College.

The campaign for Tibetan independence has played into the hands of the Chinese hard-liners, Grunfeld claims. While the 64-year-old exiled Nobel Peace Prize-winner himself has indicated since 1988 a willingness to compromise with Beijing, the continuing campaign in the West seems to confirm the hard-liners' view "that the Dalai Lama is not to be trusted and that Westerners want to break up China." Congressional hearings featuring the Dalai Lama, pro-independence rock concert benefits, and Hollywood's cinematic (and other) contributions to the cause have resulted, ironically, Grunfeld avers, in "a greater threat to Tibetan culture inside Tibet."

The repression there by Chinese authorities continues, Grunfeld notes. "Beijing has outlawed pictures of the Dalai Lama, welcomed ethnic Chinese migration into Tibet, increased security personnel at Tibetan monasteries, inhibited religious practices, and forced monks and Tibetan officials to undergo 'patriotic' retraining." More than 600 Tibetans, many of them clergymen who demonstrated against Chinese rule, are being held as political prisoners. Animosity between Tibetans and the eth-

nic Chinese pouring into Tibet (who soon may outnumber the indigenous inhabitants) is growing.

Yet since the Dalai Lama fled into exile in 1959, Tibet has undergone dramatic changes, the author points out. "It has roads, schools, hospitals, and a Tibetan middle class; the overall material well-being of the people has increased, especially in urban areas. [The capital of] Lhasa supports two Internet cafés, along with karaoke bars and discos. Religion is widely practiced, albeit with restrictions. Tibet is no longer closed, with some 50,000 tourists visiting annually. The Chinese Communist Party has thousands of Tibetan officials and Tibetan members, and Tibetan recruits serve in the Chinese military."

The Dalai Lama knows that complete independence is an unrealistic goal, and that he must continue to seek a compromise with Beijing, Grunfeld says. Last April, the Tibetan religious leader said that he is prepared to use his "moral authority with the Tibetan people so they renounce their separatist ambitions." Autonomy within the Chinese state (with the return of the Dalai Lama) would be the "best guarantee" of the

preservation of Tibetan culture, he declared. Though this stance is unpopular with "many Tibetan exiles and their followers," Grunfeld says, a compromise with Beijing is Tibet's best hope. Both sides would benefit, in his view—but will they both agree with him?



*Hollywood tried to assist the Dalai Lama's campaign with a 1997 film on his early life.*