

Before 1949, approximately 2 million Tibetans, an estimated one-fourth, entered the monkhood. The majority of those who were *not* monks were herdsmen or peasants, working as serfs on land owned by the government or by one of the thousands of monasteries. There was almost total illiteracy among the peasantry, and, even in the monkhood, only a small number were taught to read and write. Life was essentially unchanged from the era described above by the historians of the Tang Dynasty. Wooden plows and yaks were the only aid to a peasant's brute-force labor, and until the 20th century, there were no wheeled vehicles in the country. Justice was entirely at the whim of the nobility and the Dalai Lama, since there was no organized system of courts. Dismemberment was a common punishment for crimes. Polyandry was common, such that a wife was shared with all the brothers of a family. The corpses of the dead were cut up and fed to the dogs and the vultures, while human skulls and bones were used in rituals, as utensils and musical instruments. The art of Tibet reflects the fixation on death, subjugation of commoners by monstrous deities, and orgiastic "enlightenment."

But most revealing is the life of the monks themselves. At the age of about ten or twelve, young boys entered the monkhood. They immediately became the target of fierce competition between organized clubs of monks, fighting over who would get to use the boys for their homosexual pleasures. The clubs, rather like street gangs, with their own "colors" and costumes, were called *dob-dobs*. To get ahead rapidly in the religious hierarchy, a boy would need the "good luck" to be chosen by an older, established monk as his sex slave. This would assure advancement, although the boy would also have to service the friends of his owner/monk when so instructed.

The higher monks were pledged to celibacy, but that pertained only to restrictions against the penetration of females. Since the land was generally owned by the monasteries, or by the government-priesthood in the Dalai Lama's entourage, the monks would work as supervisors of the peasants and herdsmen, who belonged to their estates. Others ran businesses in Lhasa or in the villages, or were traders. The nation's wealth, although very limited, was entirely in the hands of the religious nobility.

The leading British Tibetan scholar and diplomat through the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, Hugh Richardson, took up the cause of "Tibetan independence" from China, after the flight of the Dalai Lama to India in 1959. Richardson cried that "a heavy curtain has descended upon Tibet . . . , a state of cultural degeneration [!] to which this whole people has now been reduced." What Richardson and the British prize most in the old Tibet, as a model for the world, is captured by the closing statement of his 1968 book, *A Cultural History of Tibet*: "Apologists [for Chinese policy in Tibet] may point to claims of material and mechanical progress, but even if these benefits ever reach the Tibetan population, the fact remains they were not sought by the Tibetan people themselves, and . . . represent the total negation of Tibetan civilization and culture."

Book Reviews

A Tibetan author exposes the Dalai Lama

by Mary Burdman

The Struggle for Modern Tibet: An Autobiography of Tashi Tsering

by Melvyn Goldstein, William Sibenschuh,
and Tashi Tsering

Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1997
208 pages, hardbound, \$27.95

The life of Tashi Tsering coincides with the history of modern Tibet. He now heads a project to build primary schools in villages, where, for centuries, all peasant children grew up totally illiterate. He was born in pre-1950 Tibet, which was, as Italian orientalist Fosco Maraini wrote, "the only ancient culture to have survived intact into the 20th century."

Why Tibet survived so is a complicated story — certainly, one part of this story is that there have been, and still are, many in the 20th century who wanted, and still want, to preserve Tibetan culture for their own ends. Among these are the rulers of the British Empire, their spawn in the occult societies which gave rise to Nazism, and certain types in Hollywood today, the direct descendants of Aldous Huxley, who frequented a Tibetan lama while he was a script writer in Hollywood in the 1930s and 1940s.

Tashi Tsering has some very apropos revelations. Most interesting, were his personal encounters with the clique of the Dalai Lama himself, in the period after the Dalai Lama had fled Tibet to India in 1959. Although Tashi himself had been in India for some time, had educated himself, learned English, and played a useful role in the early days of the Tibetan exile community in India, he was a commoner. As such, the "aristocrats and monk officials of the old school" were only interested in what he could do to serve them. "I wasn't one of 'them,'" Tashi writes. "From their point of view, I never could be." His efforts even to attend any meetings of the Dalai Lama's "privy council" were most rudely rejected. As the brother of the Dalai Lama, Gyalo Thondrup, once said, "In Tibetan society, there are only two types of people — the kind who'll eat *tsamba* [roasted barley meal], the



Tashi Tsering and his wife in Xi'an, in 1981.

Tibetan staple] and the kind who'll eat shit."

Tashi had spent his childhood in a Tibetan village, in a strictly feudal society—but one *in extremis*. It was common in Tibetan society for brothers to practice polyandry, and take a joint wife. This custom actually ensured population control, with the purpose to “conserve resources,” with only one wife and set of “joint” children per farmstead. Indeed, Tibet, before 1951, was a “steady-state” society: one where no progress was possible. The population, in an area the size of western continental Europe, hovered around a tiny 3-4 million people. This was ensured by the practice of polyandry, and the other social norm: that at least 10% of the population became monks or nuns.

The economy was maintained at the most primitive level. Any work beyond that of the peasant/farm household, was done by the primitive *corvée* (forced labor) system. Maintaining households of several brothers together, made more labor per household available for the *corvée* system. Peasants had to provide people and animals to transport goods and commodities for the government “transport” system—there were no roads at all, only tracks, until the Chinese began their building program in Tibet in the 1950s. The Dalai Lama owned the only automobile in the country.

Education also did not exist. Only by becoming a member of the Dalai Lama’s special boy dance troupe in Lhasa (the

boys were regularly used by homosexual monks who ran the city), did Tashi even get the opportunity to learn to read. In 1944, the government had tried to establish a Western-style school in Lhasa, but groups of rogue *dobdo* monks claimed they would kidnap the boys if it were not stopped. “The powerful forces of conservatism in Tibetan society, especially the religious establishment, clearly saw modern education as a direct threat to the dominance of Buddhism and the old theocratic power structure,” Tashi writes. “Therefore, except for one or two isolated experiments, the old government had no commitment to broad-based education.” This problem is only now beginning to be solved.

When the Chinese People’s Liberation Army entered Tibet in 1951, he recounts, they did not use violent measures. The Chinese allowed Dalai Lama and the government to exercise internal authority; and they disrupted neither religious life nor that of the monasteries. They did build roads, bridges, hospitals, and schools. They also disrupted Tibetan life in other ways. Being Chinese, they began to apply the same intensive agricultural and other methods which had allowed the development of China’s vast population over millennia. These included, beginning in 1956, social and agrarian reforms in some ethnic Tibetan areas—not Tibet proper—in Sichuan province.

It was, actually, these reforms, which the regional Tibetan lamas and landowners opposed, which began the troubles between Tibetans and Chinese. Rebellion began, and rapidly became bloody, and many Tibetan rebels fled into Tibet proper. “Although no reforms had occurred in Tibet per se, the whole episode raised the larger issues of what the Chinese presence might eventually mean to our Buddhist religion and to the integrity of the native cultures,” Tashi writes. The monks, aristocrats, and even most peasants, wanted no change. Matters came to a crisis in 1959, when the Dalai Lama fled to India, but the rebels were no match for the Chinese: “Aristocrats and monk officials poured out of the country to join the Dalai Lama in northern India.”

Tashi himself was drawn into expatriate Tibetan activities. He began interviewing Tibetans who had fled to India, but most of the people he spoke to were illiterate, and had trouble expressing themselves. “Many had not even seen the actions of the Chinese army in Lhasa. They had simply been part of the general panic that gripped the country, and their stories were of the sufferings they incurred on the journey through the mountains, not at the hands of the Chinese. I had a hard time getting concrete evidence of Chinese atrocities,” Tashi asserts—not something you would hear at any of the Dalai Lama-run Tibet “support groups” these days, where Hollywood stars like to be seen.

The Dalai Lama’s friends made other murky moves. Already in 1950, when a Chinese move into Tibet appeared imminent, the Dalai Lama’s “substantial” stocks of gold and silver had been transported to Sikkim, and remained there, in

the storehouses of the Maharaja of Sikkim, even while the Dalai Lama remained in Lhasa. The Chinese had asked for its return, but did not make a big issue of it. Through his association with Gyalo Thondrup, who had gone to India already in 1949, Tashi was personally involved, when, after the Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959, the Tibetans in exile organized a massive operation to get the gold and silver out of Gangtok and to Calcutta. Millions of dollars' worth was trucked and then flown out. This treasure (Tashi himself spent a month guarding the silver; the gold was already safe in the bank) became the core of funds which supported the Dalai Lama's government in exile.

When Tashi ran out of money, Gyalo offered to employ him, but not to educate him ("at the time, I did not know that he was the chief Tibetan working for the American Central Intelligence Agency and really had substantial financial resources"). That ended Tashi's career with the government in exile. He got support to go to America, to educate himself. There, later, he again met Gyalo Thordup, who told him that "everything to be done for Tibetans goes through His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his exile government. There is no separate job for you. There is no separate Tibet."

It was such reactions, and his desire to help his nation enter the modern world, that prompted Tashi to return to Ti-

bet, despite opposition from Tibetans and Americans alike. He returned to China in 1964.

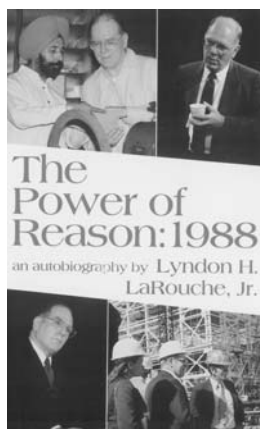
It was when Tashi was studying in China, to become a teacher in Tibet, that the Cultural Revolution broke out. Tashi was denounced, and spent years in prison. As a prisoner, he finally returned to Lhasa, where he was released in 1973. Back in China, he joined, five years later, the many thousands of victims of the Cultural Revolution who, after Deng Xiaoping came to power, flocked to Beijing to appeal their cases to the State Council. Here, Tashi was finally formally exonerated. He was then able to return to Tibet as he had wanted—as an intellectual, able and willing to teach his fellows about the great world outside Tibet.

With his characteristic initiative, Tashi was able to find the means to finally launch his current project, building schools in the impoverished villages of Tibet. For this he has found support, both in China and abroad. He found Chinese officials more open to policy-changing ideas than the Tibetan aristocrats, he writes. "I had found the Chinese in the post-Mao era to be willing to listen to complaints and opposing points of view—even those of ordinary citizens like me." With the aid of friends in America, he was able to write his spirited autobiography—which he also uses as a means to tell all about his life's purpose: educating the children of Tibet.

Books by Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr.

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—**Former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark**

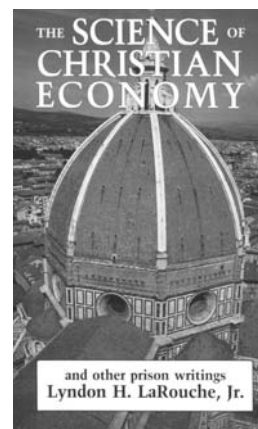
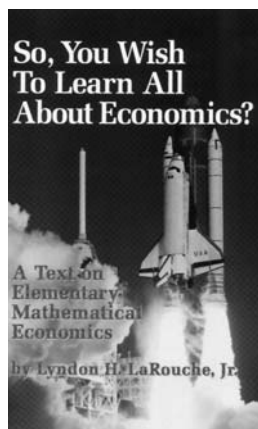


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