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THE UNITARY VIEW

Many of the descriptions of Lhasa offered to foreign readers hzave demanded little intellectual effort for their comprehension. The literature of exiled Tibetans, those who fled to India and elsewhere after the Chinese crushed the uprising of 1959, for example, speaks of a world that was, in their description, focused on the twin certainties of religion and tradition. Where other things are mentioned, it is in simple terms. "Lhasa is known all over Tibet for its easygoing and carefree way of life," wrote the noblewoman Dorje Yuthok in her autobiography, recalling the city as it had been in the 1940s. "Very sympathetic, honest, cheerful, and satisfied with their lot," said W.T. Shakabpa, for twenty years a *tsipön* or finance minister of Tibet, about his fellow countrymen, whom he described as "loyal, open, gentle, and kind." Where complexity is spoken of in such accounts, it is to be found in the elaboration of detail, not in the suggestion of ambiguity or contradiction. In Lady Yuthok's account of Lhasa before 1959, three kinds of event stand out: religious festivals, picnics, and parties. The latter were not insignificant occasions, at least among the elite: "Usually the parties lasted for seven days, but at the end if food still remained they would sometimes extend the party a few more days," she recalled of the time before 1959 when

the Chinese authorities took over the direct running of Tibet's administration, of which her brother had been one of the last *kalön*s or cabinet ministers. Less elaborate "but also festive" food was given to the servants, she adds, concluding that "all Tibetans enjoyed a slow pace and had a happy outlook on life."

In these accounts Lhasa became a place about which generalizations could thus be made with relative ease. Such statements, relying on what could be called the device of collective sentiment, are frequent in writing of this kind, yielding depictions of Tibetans as a happy people and Lhasa as a peaceful city where people wore gaily colored clothes, where everyone was religious, and where the citizens were generous and kind. The exiles' use of this device represents not naïveté or a desire to mislead, but a natural flattening of memory, an understandable form of evocation by people forced to abandon their homeland, and a counter to overstated, opposing claims by those who had usurped their positions and ridiculed their legacy; it is no coincidence that this genre emerged at the time that Western writings were replete with the simplifications of Cold War rhetoric. But its principal significance is not its content but its context: the device appeared in exile writings in English, those intended for foreigners. In the minds of the authors, for whom the multiplicity of lived experience would have been self-evident, beautification offered a rhetorical strategy to explain something highly complex to those who had neither time nor inclination to listen to more layered narratives.

Such a choice was rooted in historical experience. Tibetans had already known for some decades that the self-ethnographic project, the effort to describe oneself to others, was restricted by the emotional capacity of the audience, and that Westerners, at least in Tibet's case, had no appetite for complexity. "I suppose our distant country holds little of interest for your public except for what of the strange can be written about it," wrote Rinchen Lhamo after her arrival in London in the 1920s as the wife of a British diplomat she had met in western China. "The most absurd and the most scandalous things are said about us, and there is no one to contradict them," she observed. Her literary boldness must have been predicated on the knowledge that she had a largely independent country to return to if she wished: nationalist assertion may seem imaginary to philosophers, but it rests on practical considerations. When the exiled aristocrats began to tell their stories to foreign intermediaries fifty or so years later, they were in no position to hector their

prospective listeners. It is anyway unlikely that the Westerners who were their scribes would have sought out or recorded the public expression of critical sentiments, if indeed they had been willing to hear or understand them, since they did not speak Tibetan and relied upon translators. So it is not surprising that these texts offer outsiders a unitary view of Tibetan life, of the kind one might expect when spoken to concerning that of which one patently knows little.

We do not have to be deconstructionists to doubt descriptions of this kind. By their nature they are dubious, impossible to verify and uncertain in meaning. Does a "happy, peaceful" people, for example, mean a people who never cry or fight, or a people who rage and weep sometimes but not for more than, say, twenty minutes a day? And how would anyone, even the enlightened, know whether some of these people somewhere cried in secret, or what percentage smiled out of custom or from fear?

The answer is, of course, that such remarks are intended not as serious description, but as a gentle form of persuasive education. Such an explanation, however, becomes insufficient when the device of describing a city's population as happy, or as having any particular emotion, is used by foreigners or applied to contemporary times; shorn of a nostalgic hue, it acquires a problematic tone. "They are enthusiastic and open-minded and good at singing and dancing," says an official Chinese handbook of the Tibetan people. The remark, a staple of modern Chinese accounts of their non-Chinese nationalities, sounds condescending when uttered by an outsider and lacks the detail essential for credibility. It is not in fact much less meaningful than generalizations made by deposed aristocrats, but it belongs to a different discourse universe, in which power, not the loss of it, is idealized. It hints at not a world that is being reduced rhetorically, but one in which the experience of the Other seems to have been, for want of a better word, flat. This may not be the case, but it is as if for Chinese officials and their cohort the encounter with Tibet was one-dimensional and principally visual.

Indeed, the visual has seemed primary for the most recent Chinese rulers of Tibet. For fifty years after their arrival there, propaganda experts in China believed that publishing the seen impressions of foreign visitors to that region was the key to persuading the world of the rightness of their rule. In 1997, for example, officials in Beijing reported that a Mexican senator had declared, after five days in the city as a guest of the government, that "people in Tibet are happy and keeping pace with modern

times." China's official news agency, in publishing his remark, perhaps sensing a need to explain how the senator had reached this conclusion, added that "happy smiles on their faces served as a true indication of their happy lives." The evidence was there to be seen, this seems to say, as if the city streets and the faces of the citizens were transparent: they could be read by foreigners like the pages of an open picture book.

In a pile of rags in the corner of the alcove an elderly woman lay curled up, ill, emaciated, haggard, close to death. Her final home, which for many days had probably been unvisited, was invaded by a horde of rushing feet, of people standing with their backs to her, peering out toward the square. She sobbed. Perhaps it was the shock of change and the commotion.

I gave her a strip of dried apricot I had bought in Chengdu four weeks earlier; dried apricot was meant to be a cure for altitude sickness. Maybe it would work for whatever was making her cry.

I don't remember now if she ate it, I only remember that she cried and no one around us noticed. They were busy passing out the paving stones that had been stacked within the courtyard of the Jokhang for some new construction there. The broken slabs were now flying in parabolas above the crowd, toward the soldiers fleeing from the square.

The western frontage of the Jokhang is long, white, and interrupted at its center by the giant porch that leads to the great door of the temple. Before this doorway pilgrims perform prostrations for hour after hour, facing the statue of the Buddha unseen within the building. But some 50 yards to the right as you face the great entrance to the temple, just before you reach the old debating courtyard of the Sungchöra on the southern side of the complex, there is a second, smaller doorway set into the front wall of the temple. That was where I had taken shelter, that morning of October 1.

I had not noticed that doorway before, but I had only been in Lhasa for four days. For the first two of these I had felt too nauseated from the altitude to move, and on the third day I had been to visit the Potala. The fourth day, it was nine in the morning and it was my day to visit the Jokhang. That is why I was there. That was why the new plaza had been built, so that we tourists could gaze at the 1,400-year-old temple with an uninterrupted view. There had been 47,000 foreign tourists that year in Lhasa, I had read somewhere, and the opening up of the new square meant that we could sit on the veranda of the Barkor cafe and gaze uninterruptedly at the Jokhang through the lenses of our cameras.

47,000 was the highest the number of visitors had ever been for a single year, or would be for ten years afterward. I liked the view of the Jokhang from the square. I did not know what had been cleared away to give us that view. I was there to look at the temple, not at what had been there before. But that was before nine o'clock on October 1.

I moved quickly toward the smaller door; it seemed safer there. It is set in an alcove some 15 or 20 feet deep within the great outer walls of the temple. It is called the Shingra Door, because in the old days at the time of the Monlam festival the poor could go there to receive alms of wood from the monks, and that's what shingra *means—place of wood. Of course I didn't know that then, and anyway that day, when I took shelter in the doorway, the monks were passing out stones, not wood. It was 1987, the year of the Fire Hare. It was the year the monks passed out stones, not wood.*

I couldn't see the monks inside; only their bare arms appeared through the crack in the door as they passed the broken pieces of paving stone to the women in the alcove. They gathered the debris in their striped aprons—they must have been married, since the aprons are meant to be a sign of matrimony, and they were of a certain age, no doubt with children already in their teens. Without speaking, the women, holding their aprons, sagging with the weight of rocks, by the corners, slipped quietly out of the alcove into the crowd gathered beside the Sungchöra, opposite the police station.

In front of us, not sheltering but within the crowd itself, I could see another woman sobbing. She was neither young nor emaciated, and she was not passing out stones to be hurled at the troops. She simply stood and watched and cried.

This was really strange. This I really could not understand. The soldiers were fleeing across the square in disarray, an abandoned rifle was being smashed by the children in front of the crowd, and the snatch squads had given up attempts to grab demonstrators from the throng. So this woman's tears could not be the result of grief. There was no reason for her to cry. She was witnessing an epic moment, when the police had been routed without loss and when, for the first time in 30 years, the Barkor Square and the streets of Lhasa had been reclaimed by their inhabitants. Her tears could only have been tears of relief or happiness.

Literary effusions about the happiness of Tibetans before the Chinese invasion do not always cohere with the stories in which they appear: the texts, we could say, communicate more meanings than their authors deign to speak of. Even the autobiography of the present Dalai Lama, the

fourteenth of his line, sometimes tells of incidents that, although small, jar with the collective myth: the sweepers at the main temple are caught stealing the golden offering bowls from his private rooms, the monks in the main temple fight among themselves when they are meant to be praying, and many of the officials he meets are irritable or bad-tempered. Had he wished, he could have told worse stories of monkish misbehavior. In 1921, for example, the monks of Loseling, a college in the great monastery of Drepung, the Heap of Rice, had urinated and defecated in the gardens of his predecessor, the Great Thirteenth, because they disapproved of his antipathy to China. At that time, it seems, not even distrust of Beijing or reverence for the Tibetan leader had been collective sentiments.

The exiled aristocrats also concede more in the minutiae of their texts than their generalizations admit. Jamyang Sakya, another lady of the highest social standing, describes in her memoir the endless fighting in the 1940s between the different branches of her husband's family as they struggled to get control of the Sakya dynasty and its treasures; in these battles, the combatants were not laymen but lamas of the highest rank. Dorje Yuthok mentions the sexual adventures of her husband, onetime governor of Tibet's eastern province of Kham, and his frequent desertion of her for other women, but our own connivance as outsiders in the manufacture of Tibetan myths should not be forgotten: the more salacious parts of her account were removed, it is rumored, by her American amanuensis, who was reportedly more intent than she on preserving an image of a Tibet unblemished by unsavory desire before the dark days of invasion.

But there are more serious issues than philandering or family arguments that undermine the perception of Lhasa as a single story. Let us take three of the most controversial examples: the sacking of Tengyeling, the blinding of Lungshar, and the prison death of Retring. In terms of social conflict or brutality, those episodes scarcely merit mention if compared to the levels of endemic violence and abuse in China and elsewhere at that time, or perhaps even now. But locally they were of importance and must be woven into the tapestry of the city's recollections.

In 1912 the monastery of Tengyeling gave shelter to Chinese troops during the Tibetan government's attempt to wrest back Lhasa from the Chinese army that had seized the city two years earlier—Beijing's response to the punitive invasion by the British earlier that decade. Tengyeling was one of the highest monasteries in the land, and its chief incumbent, Demo *hutuktu,* was one of only eight lamas in central Tibet

entitled to serve as a regent in the inevitable minority of a Dalai Lama. It was not its first instance of perfidiousness: twenty years earlier, the attendants of Demo *hutuktu* had conspired to assassinate the thirteenth Dalai Lama, and had sewn evil incantations against him into the boot soles of a sorcerer, a method reputed to intensify the potency of curses. When the Chinese troops had taken Lhasa in 1910 and the Thirteenth had fled to India, the monks of Tengyeling sided with the new rulers, not foreseeing that the fall of the dynasty in Beijing would result in the Chinese troops being ousted from Tibet two years later. For that offense the monastery was stripped of its possessions, and six government officials who had allied with its monks were killed or executed; the Demo was banned from recognition in future incarnations, and many of his monks fled to China.

That same year Charles Bell, the British envoy in Lhasa, capitalized on his encounters with the thirteenth Dalai Lama during his exile in India, the first time any ruler of Tibet had visited a territory ruled by Westerners. Bell persuaded the Dalai Lama to allow four Tibetan youths of noble birth to travel to England to attend the British public school of Rugby, with a Tibetan aristocrat, a senior official by the name of Lungshar, accompanying them as their guardian. The boys returned to Tibet in due course as technicians and engineers to plant what were meant to be, in the eyes of the Dalai Lama and his British advisor respectively, seeds of either progress or British dependency. One of the Rugby graduates later constructed the first electric generator in Lhasa; another worked briefly at making maps. Lungshar, however, returned with no affection for the British at all, an ingratitude they did not forget, and with notions of modernity rather more substantial than the provision of electric light. By 1933 he had founded a group in Lhasa called the *Kyicho Kuntun*—"those who are all united on the side of happiness"—which attracted a hundred or more members and was dedicated to introducing parliamentary democracy, a constitutional monarchy, and a modernized civil service. Not without the tacit approval of the British, Lungshar's enemies persuaded the Tibetan government and the monastic leaders that his tentative efforts at constitutional reform concealed such intentions as a Bolshevik plot to overthrow the regime. He was sentenced to have his eyes gouged out.

The blinding of Lungshar was exceptional, so much so that no one living could be found who knew from experience how to do it. The

Tibetan who ended up with the task had to rely on half-remembered recollections of his predecessors' technique, which was to strap the knuckle bones of a yak into the eye sockets and so tighten the thongs around the head that the eyeballs would pop out. In the event, the technique worked with only one eye; the other had to be carved out with a knife, causing even more than the expected pain to the former official, who was not helped by the fact that the sedatives he had been administered were largely ineffective, so that he remained conscious throughout the process. Defenders of the image of the happy, carefree, preinvasion Tibet point out, not unreasonably, that the clumsiness of the eye gouging shows it to have been an exception; its detractors cite it as proof of a tyrannical regime and an uncivilized culture. But what is important here is not the choice, nor even the brutality, of the punishment. It is the fact that the need for it arose at all. A city that had to punish its political reformers may or may not have been brutal, but it cannot have been totally unified, and it cannot be accurately portrayed in terms of collective sentiment. Neither can its members have been wedded uncritically to the continuance of tradition. The Lungshar episode is significant not for the horror of his experience but because, in a state where there were only 200 or so lay governmental officials of rank, perhaps half as many of the elite were involved, even as late as the 1930s, in the process of designing innovative forms of governance and representation in a conscious process of political reconstruction and improvement.

The civil war that followed Retring's attempt to reclaim the regency in 1947 was more baroque in character. Retring had served as regent until 1941, when he had handed the position over to an older monk of similar rank. Like his fellow *hutuktu*, Demo, fifty years before, he came to regret the loss of power and seems to have allowed his retinue to conspire by various means to assassinate his successor, the regent Taktra. The last attempt was allegedly the dispatching of a primed hand grenade concealed in a parcel marked for the regent's personal attention. According to the official account, only the servant who opened the parcel was injured, and Retring, identified and arrested as the chief conspirator, died of natural causes a few days later in a dungeon in the bowels of the Potala Palace. Unofficial versions of these events say the hand grenade, which was displayed outside the Lhasa courthouse as evidence of the plot, showed no signs of having exploded, and insist that Retring

must have been murdered. To be more specific, they allege that he was killed by those intent on avenging the humiliation of Lungshar fifteen years earlier. It is widely believed, without much evidence, that the killer did the deed by binding or beating the lama's testicles until the pain was so excruciating that Retring died.

The Japanese spy-explorer Hisao Kimura was living in Lhasa at the time, disguised as a Mongolian monk, and was himself briefly arrested on suspicion of involvement in the attempted coup. "Most Lhasans just felt that this was a rather foolish ploy in a struggle between rival nobles that would, in the normal run of things, continue behind the scenes without affecting everyday life," he told his biographer some four decades later. Retring must, however, have had wider support than just a group of nobles, because the monks of Sera Je took the opportunity to rise up in revolt and were defeated only after a week of fighting. According to the most recent autobiography of the fourteenth Dalai Lama, who describes having heard the sound of gunfire from his rooms in the Potala as a young boy, a "considerable number" of the Sera monks died in the aftermath of the abortive coup; the actual number was at least 200. "All in all the whole affair was very silly," he adds, another case where the tradition of exile writing for the benefit of foreigners falls short of complexity. There were some 20,000 monks in the capital alone, and the views of monks were never an insignificant factor in political decision making in the state. Kimura points out that the Sera monks, if they had not trusted so much in the power of amulets to deflect bullets, might very well have overthrown the government. Not quite such a silly affair after all, perhaps.

Retring and the Sera monks may not have had a modern ideology to fuel their intrigues, or a mission to improve Tibetan governance such as that attributed to Lungshar, or a moral wish to crusade against the decadence of established hierarchy—Tibetans and historians are still arguing about whether the government under Taktra was even more corrupt and incompetent than it had been under Retring, when it had unquestionably been so. Retring, like Demo one of the highest and in theory most spiritually elevated lamas in the country, appears to have had a simpler motive: he wanted power, and felt betrayed by the successor regent for not having yielded it to him. But this compelled him to seek practical, if, to Westerners, curious alliances, and he had written to the Chinese government for help of a distinctly modern kind, suggest-

ing unsuccessfully that they send airplanes to scatter leaflets threatening to bomb Lhasa if he were opposed.

As for the Sera monks, they distrusted the slight inclinations toward modernization that they detected in such plans as the re-equipping of the Tibetan army, the setting up of schools to teach English, and the sending of aristocrats' children to India for higher education. Modernization, like the British, seemed to represent a threat to their traditions and their authority. Their assessment was by no means uninformed: they were well aware that Western theories of government rejected the paramount place granted to religion in the Tibetan political system, and they certainly knew that Western governments had little hesitation in imposing their views on weaker nations. Neither was their decision to support a partly religious conception of governance merely the unquestioned inheritance of tradition: it was part of a deliberate ideology, the exceptionality of which they took great pride in. When officials of the Tibetan government wrote to Gilbert Murray in the 1920s about his proposal that Tibet apply to join the League of Nations, they gave just such reasons for rejecting his approach.

But what is perhaps most intriguing to the Western observer is that, like Retring, the Sera monks had no qualms about turning for support to China, since it was the one nation they knew to be reliably opposed to Britain. "Better an enemy who is close at hand than a friend who is far," argued the *kalön,* or cabinet minister, Kabshöpa in opposing his more anglophilic colleagues, just as he had earlier denounced Lungshar for his attempts at alien innovation. Kabshöpa's apothegm, rich with the sinuousness of political compromise, evokes the complexities of Tibetan politics more eloquently than most historical texts; so does the sad irony that, fifty years later, his son, seeking refuge from the Chinese occupation, would flee to England. We might think that we can perceive now as errors, through the lens of hindsight, the judgments of Kabshöpa, or that by implication we can recognize what appears to be their converse, the longstanding ardency of Tibetan nationalism. But we would do well to recall the complexities of such events, not least the fact that it was the most conservative of the Lhasan elite who at that time encouraged the Chinese to intervene in the running of their state, and, in some cases, to overthrow it.

The police station was now in flames from where the crowd had torched the door to force entrance to the building. The plainclothesmen lurking in the

crowd had long since been kicked and beaten and thrown out, and the monk-demonstrators arrested earlier that day were escaping through the smoke-filled windows. Even the Chinese with the Betacam had been forced by the hail of stones to run away. He was cleverer than the police, young boys who had dropped their guns before they fled. When he ran, he kept hold of his camera and within it the film that would later identify the protestors who at that time rejoiced.

At the far end of the Barkor Square I could see truckloads of troops waiting for orders to advance. There was no attempt by the demonstrators to force the police farther away than the edge of the square; people were busy reveling in the reclaiming of the Sungchöra. It seemed they were dancing on the grave of history, of three decades of submission that they had just buried. It didn't seem to be of concern to them that the dance would shortly end.

Knowing little of the history unfolding before us, we Westerners worried instead about how bad the end was going to be. We could see men in green moving on the flat rooftops behind the police station, beyond the range of stones. It was nearly ten o'clock: an hour had passed, long enough for a decision to be reached in some dank room within the Party offices. Among the Western travelers an arcane debate began. Some said we should mingle with the crowd to deter the police from shooting. I argued that we should watch and witness from the margins, lest we be filmed as evidence of foreign subversives in the crowd.

I had a better reason for preferring the sidelines that I did not confess, and that reason was fear. It was because of this that when the officer in the dark glasses stepped to the front edge of the roof and lifted his right hand slowly toward the crowd, I was standing to one side of his arc of fire.

It had not occurred to me before that you can't see bullets flying through the air. You can know them only from their aftermath, like a virus recognized by the scars left on a face. In the low-walled open square there was little resonance, and the reports sounded not much louder or more distinct than the firecrackers I had heard almost every day since reaching Guangdong on the coast of China three months earlier. The bricks spat out the truth in little spurts of dust as the first rounds nestled into the front wall of the Jokhang, six feet or so above the crowd.

I didn't stop to watch. I ran from the Shingra alcove across the southern Barkor to the doorway of the primary school on the far side of the police station. I don't know why I ran in that direction. As I reached the school wall, I saw the old monk Champa Tenzin from the Jokhang being carried on the

shoulders of the crowd, the hero of the moment for having led the rescue of the prisoners from the flaming police station.

They placed him on a window ledge beside me for all the crowd to hail and festoon with greeting scarves. The scarves showered down on him, arcing through the air above our heads, a sort of slow-motion opposite to the bullets. I could see the deep-pink patches of flesh, like open lips beaming in celebration, where the fresh burns had peeled away the skin on his upper arms. He waved the scarves. People cheered.

Dark Glasses was aiming down now, and people began to fall over: he was shooting at their feet. Now two others had joined him, with long-barreled guns, and they were less discriminating. Monks were being shot as they escaped from the station windows and ran toward the crowd. Down a side street, troops were moving forward. Someone was throwing furniture from the windows of the school, trying to hit the policemen on the station roof. There were no longer puffs from the brickwork above our heads; instead, people in the crowd fell over. Suddenly others began to run. The Chinese had returned.

Behind the power struggles and state intrigues of pre–1950 Lhasa there were other, less obvious forms of political diversity: the day-to-day dissemination of foreign and of heterodox opinions. In part this was a consequence of technology and its incursions: as the British troops had made their way to Lhasa in the first years of the century, the telegraph wire had followed. Even then, news took three hours to reach the invasion force from London, at least when it was still camped not so far from the Indian border. The telegraph line reached the town of Gyantse, halfway to Lhasa, within a year of the invasion and in 1921, at Tibetan request, the British extended it to the capital. In the 1940s the Dalai Lama had his own telephone, not to mention an American Dodge and a Baby Austin with the license plate TIBET 1. By 1936, the British diplomat Spencer Chapman was able to report that he could hear in Lhasa radio reports broadcast from London, and that many wealthy Lhasans, of whom a significant number were fluent in English, had their own radio sets.

There was also a measure of internationalism to the city's population and its connections. The legation of the British was at Dekyi Lingka, and that of the Nepalese at their residency just to the south of Shatra; the Bhutanese had a consulate in the Barkor, and there was a consul representing the Ladakhi Muslims who had lived in the city for centuries.

Chinese too were once again allowed to take up residence and to set up a governmental office (and a radio transmitter) in the city after 1935, twenty-three years after their expulsion. Ideas flowed as much through trade as through diplomacy, and probably the most potent source of foreign thought was the hill resort in northeast India to which many traders and aristocrats repaired to procure wealth through commerce: the Indian town of Kalimpong. Like Paris to nineteenth-century Americans or to early Chinese Communists, it was where one went to acquire an education, to see the world, to become *urbane*. Again like Paris, it was a hotbed of radical ideas, where Tibetans from distant Kham and Amdo—the marchlands of eastern Tibet, closer to the influence of both Chinese Nationalists and early Chinese Communists, areas through which the latter had passed on the Long March in 1934–35—gathered to plan revolution, where the great Tibetan *émigré* scholar and radical nationalist Gendun Chöphel had written and studied, and where, later, Tibetan aristocrats would meet to plan guerrilla warfare with the CIA. It was there that children of most aspiring Lhasa families with wealth had been sent to acquire knowledge of English, and it was there that the Christian convert, Tharchin *Babu,* gathered Tibetan intellectuals together for over thirty years to write each week for the *Melong*, the only newspaper in Tibetan. Even the former dancer Tashi Tsering, who in 1964 became the first Tibetan exile in the West to return to Lhasa, had moved there from Chinese-occupied Lhasa in 1957 in his eagerness to acquire modern education and ideas.

But Kalimpong was not the only foreign source of divergent thought, and certainly not the one that would make the most lasting impact on the city. Kimura, the Japanese spy sent in disguise to check, needlessly, if anyone was using Tibetan routes to supply arms to Chiang Kai-shek's forces in Chongqing, recalled that on his return to Lhasa in 1948 he found a small, dissident group of Tibetans who met discreetly to discuss progressive ideas. The group included members of the highest aristocratic families in Lhasa. But unlike the coterie Lungshar had gathered around him some twelve years earlier, the orientation of its leaders was not toward ideas associated with the British in the south, but toward the east. By the 1940s China had already become the source of inspiration for the most energetic modernizers in Tibet.

At the center of this group of Chinese-inspired radicals was *Baba* Phuntsog Wanggyal. Through the good offices of Dorje Yuthok's hus-

band, then residing with a different lover in Chamdo as its governor, the young revolutionary Phuntsog Wanggyal had been able to get permission to travel to Lhasa from his home in Bathang in the Kham area of eastern Tibet, arriving in the capital not long before Kimura. The governor knew of his protégé's progressive inclinations, but by 1943 Phuntsog Wanggyal was able to gain entrance to the Tibetan capital. Later to emerge as the leading Tibetan communist, he would become the main intermediary of the Chinese in their attempt to create an alliance with the Lhasa leadership after the invasion. But at this time he was known simply as a progressive, an intellectual secular radical from the east who had the advantage of fluent Chinese and of a modern education, gained partly from American missionaries in his hometown, partly from the Chinese nationalists who had educated him in Chongqing, and partly—though he may have been discreet about this at the time—from illicit copies of writings by Marx and other Western authors translated into Chinese by early Communists.

At the house of Phuntsog Wanggyal's friends in Lhasa, other Tibetans eager for contact with the outside, Chinese and modern worlds would gather. Among them were Phuntsog Tashi Takla, a childhood friend of the Dalai Lama's elder brother Gyalo Thondup and later a brother-in-law to the Dalai Lama as well as a participant in the 1951 and 1984 negotiations in Beijing. Both Phuntsog Tashi and Gyalo Thondup were from the east, fluent in Chinese, and partly educated by the Chinese Nationalists in pre-Communist days in Nanjing. Changngöpa, one of the more progressive aristocrats, was there too, as was Tomjor Tethong, three of whose sons were later to become ministers in the exile Tibetan government; it was in the Tethong family mansion in Lhasa that the young activists formed a group called the "Tibetan People's Unified Alliance."

Phuntsog Wanggyal already had an introduction to Dorje Yuthok from her estranged husband in Chamdo, and she arranged for him to meet with her brother, *Kalön* Surkhang. The twenty-one-year-old radical told the minister of their plan for reforming Tibetan politics and society, and their intention to stage an armed uprising against the Chinese in the eastern areas, to lead to the whole of the Tibetan plateau becoming a "combined regime." On the first visit, Phuntsog Wanggyal recited a song he had composed to call for the creation of a single Tibetan state—"Rise up, Rise up, Rise up, Tibetan Brothers." He sang it to the tune of "Marching Through Georgia" while his comrade Ngawang Kesang,

also weaned by Christian missionaries, accompanied him on the organ. They moved Surkhang to tears, but to no result: the Tibetan government believed that the Japanese would defeat China and save them from the Chinese threat, and so saw no need to support a rebellion.

Among the would-be progressives of Lhasa who gathered in that house in the Barkor, few realized at that time that Phuntsog Wanggyal was a communist, or that the modernization they discussed would come so soon. Neither did they know that it would be not them but two of the aristocrats from that group—Takla and Tethong—who, having fled from their Chinese rulers, would live the rest of their lives in relative freedom. Phuntsog Wanggyal, neither an aristocrat nor an opponent of the Chinese modernists, would remain in Lhasa and, purged in the antirightist campaign of 1958, spend most of the following twenty years in prison.

Before Phuntsog Wanggyal gathered his group around him, two other houses had been centers of Chinese influence. In the eighteenth century the *ambans*—the commissioners sent by the Manchu emperors to represent them in Tibet—had lived in the Tromsikhang, the great mansion on the northern side of the Jokhang, built by the Sixth Dalai Lama and used by the Mongol ruler Lhazang Khan as his Lhasa residence until 1717. In 1751 two of these *ambans* had been killed in their rooms in the Tromsikhang by a Tibetan crowd after one of the commissioners had stabbed the then Chief Minister of Tibet to death. The assassination of the two Manchu officials, which the emperors seem to have failed to avenge at the time, was recorded on six stone tablets embedded in the front wall of the Tromsikhang. In the summer of 1997 most of the building was torn down as part of a wave of architectural transformation that characterized that decade. The stone tablets were taken away, "for reasons of safety," and only the frontage remained.

When Colonel Younghusband and the British Expeditionary Force arrived in Lhasa in 1904, they found that the *ambans*, and with them the center of Chinese influence in Lhasa, had moved to a different building. It was known as the Yamen, and was situated in a compound just within the Lingkor, to the southwest of the main city of Lhasa, in an area later known as Lubu. The British, greatly disconcerted by the discovery that the thirteenth Dalai Lama had fled to Mongolia just prior to their arrival, were desperate to find a person of rank worthy to sign a surrender agreement and to submit the Tibetan government to their demands, and so sought advice from China's representative, who in more propi-

tious circumstances had claimed authority over the Tibetans. It was in the Yamen that Younghusband and the *Amban* Youtai had drunk tea while they planned the formal humiliation of the Tibetans whose soldiers the British officer had recently massacred in battle. The English visitors were struck by the fact that the *amban* offered them Huntley and Palmers biscuits, produced in the town of Reading, just to the west of London; the company still advertises this event as a highlight of its global history. But even the visitors noticed that the fate of the conquered was not dispensed with the same graciousness as the tea. The Imperial Commissioner "presented a never-failing front of sympathy and apparent good-feeling" toward the British, one of them wrote later, adding that Youtai "never made a speech or wrote a letter without referring to the pig-headed stupidity of the people entrusted to his care." It was for the former of these attitudes, certainly not the latter, that the *amban* was later dismissed by the emperor.

Eight years later, the Tibetans were given an opportunity by the collapse of the Qing dynasty to take revenge for his condescension and ordered his successors to leave Lhasa and Tibet for good, along with all Chinese troops and officials in the region. Later, history turned full circle yet again, and after 1959 the site once occupied by the Yamen came to be dwarfed by a compound to the south that comprised the new *junqu* or Chinese Military Headquarters in Lhasa, on what had been parkland along the riverside. Stretching half a mile from end to end, it is ten to twenty times larger than the Yamen ever was. It is only one of a dozen or more similar establishments within or bordering modern Lhasa, and not by any means the largest.

In 1934 a Chinese mission, sent to offer condolences on the death of the Great Thirteenth, was allowed to visit Lhasa, the first such officials to have been granted entry since the expulsion of 1912. It was at this time that a Chinese office, later to be termed the Tibet Office of the Commission for Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs, was once again set up in Lhasa. It was housed in the Kyitöpa, a building on the southwest corner of the Barkor, diagonally opposite the Sungchöra, the courtyard on the south side of the Jokhang used traditionally for debating. Later, after the Chinese Communists took over Tibet and the Chinese officials working at the Kyitöpa had fled to India and onward to Taiwan, the office was turned into a shop, and the building adjoining it became the Barkor Primary School. From its windows, in

October 1987, desks were dropped on Chinese policemen in an effort to stop their shooting from the police station roof, which it overlooked. Shortly after that incident, the Kyitöpa was rebuilt to house tourists and named the Mandala Hotel, in its time the only such establishment on the Lhasa Barkor.

From 1947, Phuntsog Wanggyal worked at the Kyitöpa teaching Chinese songs to the offspring of the more forward-thinking aristocrats and of some local Chinese and Tibetan Muslims, one of whom became his wife. He had somewhat untraditional tastes in music, and taught his students the "Internationale," the "March of the Volunteers," the "Ode to Yan'an," "The Yellow River Cantata," the "March of the Motherland," and "The Song of Wind" (the last two were Russian). "We moved slowly at first," he told his biographers, "trying to influence the thinking of students by teaching them revolutionary songs and talking about the issues and subjects the songs raised."

The Kyitöpa must have been a busy place, because it not only had the Chinese government office with its radio set on the top floor and the schoolchildren reciting revolutionary songs on the second floor, but also was the center for the many spies and spymasters who worked for Beijing under various guises. Lhasa had become a place of strategic importance, and four separate Chinese agencies had sent competing teams of agents and recruiters there with the officials from Beijing to collect information. There were the network run by China's Ministry of Defense, the system operated by the *junshe* or military investigation bureau of the Military Affairs Committee in Beijing, the *zhongtong* outfit working for the Nationalist Party, and the *xibeixitong* or northwest group organized by the regional administration, based in the Chinese city of Xi'an. The members of each were largely unknown to the others and rivalry was intense. The seniormost Chinese official in the Kyitöpa later wrote implying that he had not known which of his staff or community were spies working for someone else, and it was rumored that a Chinese man found murdered in the Barkor one night in 1949 had been a spy in the *junshe* punished by his handler for insubordination. Kimura had at least two Japanese agents working with him in the city, disguised as Mongolians, and, if Chinese accounts are correct, the British had their own spy network too, so efficient (it is claimed) that in 1949 they provided the Tibetan government with the identity of every crypto-Communist in Lhasa.

Among the most senior in this shadowy community was a Tibetan called Jiang Xinxi, a one-star general in the Chinese army whose official designation was "Liaison Officer to the Tibet garrison." He also held a secret position at the highest level of the Defense Ministry espionage operation in Tibet; at the same time he ran a restaurant in Lhasa called the Doshirnimba, probably as much to supplement his income as to add to his sources of information (the restaurant failed because everyone assumed its purpose was the latter). He was the uncle of Phuntsog Wanggyal and, despite their apparently opposite ideologies, the source of his protection in the city; he had written to the Nationalist government in Nanjing vouching that his nephew was not a Communist while knowing full well that he was. Later, after the Communists came to power, it was probably the nephew who protected the uncle, since General Jiang, then imprisoned in Chongqing, survived the vicious purges of 1952 and in his old age in the 1980s returned to the Tibetan capital where he had once been so prominent in the underground.

By the time Kimura began visiting Phuntsog Wanggyal and his friends in Lhasa, the house had become a center for Chinese study and for the whispering of modern, egalitarian ideas. Similar notions had been floated in the Lhasa air several times, such as at the short-lived English school at Gyantse in 1923, within Lungshar's group in 1933, and in the circle around Gendun Chöphel before his exile to India in 1939. But those currents of radicalism were influenced by British and Indian intellectuals; politically, they were in essence alien. The group that Kimura discovered was largely nourished by a neighboring culture, which had educated many of its members to the highest levels and which was rooted in the same solid history that the three buildings of the Tromsikhang, the Yamen, and the Kyitöpa embodied: centuries of Chinese influence in Tibet.

These gatherings were part of the daily comings and goings in the streets of Lhasa in the years before the invasion; they barely merit a mention in the pages of history. The events that do find a place in state narrative—such as the torture of Lungshar, the death of Retring, and the siege of Sera Je—are used by political factions as evidence to support whatever is their chosen moral assessment of Tibetan society. Some use such incidents to demonstrate the monasteries' resistance to modernity; others cite them as proof that the Lhasa establishment suppressed attempts to reunite Tibet with China; some deploy them to

accuse Khampas or eastern Tibetans of wanting to unseat the central Tibetans' hold on power; others see the hand of British imperialism behind these groups.

Our endeavor here, however, is not to judge would-be Tibetan politicians and their associates but to describe the layered character of their capital, and to follow the web of meanings and historicities that constitute its nature. For archaeologists of the urban soul, these incidents and buildings are shards found among the substrata of the city that indicate the weaving of its moral structure and the complications of its narrative. They are threads of an experience more richly textured than the depictions of collective sentiment admit, each one adding, if we can but read them, to the intricacies of the city's fabric.

I stopped in the alleyway that leads south from the Barkor toward the Shatra, where two English people were said to have rooms. I leaned against a wall and took a breath. The gunfire from the police station roof had been aimed downward, and I had run directly away from the station. That meant I had run into and through the line of fire. So much for education. So much for literacy and intelligence.

Back on the Barkor, the street from which I had just come, a posse of men, still within firing range of the soldiers now advancing, were running into a shop. They were carrying a man awkwardly draped among them. Seconds later the group backed clumsily out of the shop door, still with their burden. There was a red cross painted on a sign above the door. I understood: the man was injured; the shop was a clinic.

The little group stumbled with their human burden down the alleyway and stopped beside me. Why me? What could I do? They lifted the ripped cloth around his leg to show the hole. I panicked. I had never seen a bullet wound before. I tried to look knowledgeable, but I couldn't pretend. "Hospital," I said, "hospital. Menkhang, menkhang.*" I pushed them away. I had already delayed them in getting him to a doctor.*

A hospital? A brain cell stirred. I had already seen them go into the clinic in the Barkor and reemerge seconds later; no one could have treated him that fast. The staff had refused to treat him. If it was forbidden for the roadside clinic to help, it followed that if he went to a hospital, he would be arrested. That was why they had run to me.

In the strange world in which I now found myself, it was unimportant that bullets wound people. What mattered was that the wounds branded them

as protestors, criminals. So they would die not from bullets but from lack of medical treatment.

The group half carried, half dragged their friend along the alleyway and disappeared into the maze of tiny streets that is the old city of Lhasa. From the Barkor the sound of shooting continued, muffled to a thin crackle by the thick, mud-packed stone walls of the old Tibetan houses, as if their ancient fabric could alone absorb the rifle fire.