

The Chinese Frontiersman and the Winter Worms - Chen Kuiyuan in the T.A.R., 1992-2000

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Abstract

From 1992 to 2000 the Party Secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Region was Chen Kuiyuan, an Chinese administrator from Inner Mongolia. In this paper I try to summarise Chen's policy decisions, and to look at signs of the uncertain distinctions that can be made between those which were his own creation and those which were impositions from the Centre.

After the outbreak of unrest in the region in 1987 policy in the T.A.R. focussed on security or containment measures, but from 1990, as security methods became more sophisticated, these was combined with the promotion of rapid economic development. This shift is particularly associated with a visit to the region by the Chinese leader Jiang Zemin in July of that year.

When Chen was appointed to office in Tibet some two years later he continued this dual approach, but consolidated his position by a number of devices which were partly rhetorical and partly policy initiatives: he took to overstating the threat of nationalist unrest, he created a boom in petty urban commerce, and he began to insist openly on the importance of state-encouraged migration of Chinese traders into the region.

From 1994 he began to carry out a crackdown on religious beliefs, which included the ban on public worship of the Dalai Lama and the "patriotic re-education" of monks and nuns. These, like his economic and migration policies, had been sanctioned in great detail by the central authorities in the *Dus rabs gsar par skyod-pa'i gser zam* ("A Golden Bridge Leading Into a New Era"), the documents containing the decisions of the famous meeting called the Third National Forum on Work in Tibet, held in Beijing in July 1994.

But Chen went on to add to these devices a new policy front: attacking Tibetan scholars and intellectuals, and in particular reshaping the pedagogy of Tibetan history and culture in the University of Tibet. By 1997 he had evidently read quite widely and began to present himself to the public as a kind of contemporary scholar-administrator. In 1999 two important volumes appeared which appear to have been designed to strengthen this image - a volume of his selected speeches and memoranda (*Xizang de Jiaobu*, "Tibet's Steps", 1999) and the collection of his poems extolling the difficulties of his office (*Lantian baixue*, "Blue Sky, White Snow", 1999).

The question thus arises as to whether Chen's thought and style in Tibet are derived from a specific tradition of Chinese administration, and in particular as to whether his approach represents a continuity with what Uradyn Bulag has described as the tradition of the Chinese frontiersman - the mandarin sent to placate the border regions, as in fact Chen had helped to do in Inner Mongolia before he was sent to Tibet. Unfortunately I can only pose these questions without yet being able to answer them.

ON May 1st 1992 a handwritten note arrived on my desk in London. It contained a list of three names, all nuns arrested the previous month for a brief protest in Lhasa, and an account of a woman severely beaten in Drapchi prison that March for wearing a clean shirt to mark the Tibetan New Year. Between these two reports was this note:

TAR new Party Secretary - Mr Den Shun Yon. He is the leader of 180 officials who came to Tibet recently for 3357 UN project, in disguise. He is the new *tru-shi*.

It was to be nine months before the official Chinese press would confirm that a new *kru'u-shi* (Chinese: *zhushi*) or party secretary had taken office as the paramount leader in Tibet: as usual, the Tibetan underground, despite the uncertainties of foreign names and titles, was proved largely correct. Surrounded by confusion, deception and the ongoing saga of official violence, Chen Kuiyuan had arrived to take over control of Tibet. Eight years later, just before midnight on 17th October 2000, I was sitting in a foreigner's guestroom in Lhasa watching the local television news reports - shots of foreign dignitaries visiting Beijing, celebrations marking the anniversary of the 1950 liberation of Chamdo, and Chinese officials donating new computers in Lhasa - when Kunkyid and Lotse, the two best known news-presenters on Tibetan-language TV, suddenly disappeared. Instead, for a few seconds, there was the blue screen with yellow lettering used only for important announcements: Secretary Chen had been replaced. The reign of the winter worm had ended.

Fritillarii fritillarii, the most famous of Tibetan medicinal herbs, called locally *yartsagambu* or "summer-grass, winter-worm" because of its seasonally changing function, was also one of the main products which officials in the Chen era used as a symbol of the new prosperity which they insisted Tibetans could gain if they only would become commercially active. It also came to be the term of choice among Tibetans during Chen's rule for those Chinese officials stationed in Tibet who found excuses to travel back to the interior to avoid spending winters on the plateau; Chen was the quintessential winter worm, both for his encouragement of commerce and for his travel schedule. In fact, by the time he was replaced Chen had not been in Lhasa for most of the previous two years, apart from a few important meetings. He had spent much of the time in Chengdu, the nearest Chinese city, governing his fiefdom by telegram and phone call. Like so many of his colleagues, he regarded the atmosphere of Tibet as unsupportable, officially because it has too little oxygen and so produces medical conditions which the average Chinese official's body cannot sustain. The difficulties of this oxygen deprivation form a recurrent part of the rich Chinese rhetoric that heroises the sufferings faced by far-flung frontier officials, and it is still the standard remark which Chinese residents in Tibet will give if asked their impressions of the place. For Chen, the suffering of airlessness even formed part of the poetry which he was later to publish to mark his standing as an intrepid and dedicated frontier administrator-cum-man-of-letters:

As the plane descends, I am in low spirits, my mind is dazed,
Oxygen is supplied and medicine swiftly poured.
As I lie in bed, we speak first of the riots,
Sure enough, beyond the bow-strings, there are separate sounds.
Overtly opposing the government, instigating fury among the masses,
Secret plans in sinister rooms, moving forward their malicious intentions.
I lean on a stick to go up to [the building], we have detailed deliberations,
These violent people have themselves to blame for the bitter fruits.

(Chen Kuiyuan, "Return to Lhasa (28 May 1993)" in *Lantian baixue* ('Blue Sky, White Snow'), Beijing Chubanshe, Beijing, 1999)

But the epithet which Chen earned by his trips between the high plateau and the Chinese interior did not refer to medical pressures. It indicated a kind of administrator whose commitment to his or her posting in Tibet (the duration of these postings had anyway been reduced in the 1990s to three years in most cases) seemed marginal at best, judging by their propensity for spending the winters in China. Chen's reign signified a new wave of this type of Chinese officials in Tibet: the "summer-grass, winter-

worm" technocrats and place-holders whose concept of their appointment was centred (so it was believed) on maximum benefit and minimum effort - and especially on minimum effort to understand local culture. This was the ethos of local administration that Chen came to epitomise, and which looks likely to survive him.

Winter worm is thus not an empty term of abuse: it carries with it a rich history of implication and memory. It refers by implication to its opposite, an earlier generation of Chinese and eastern Tibetan officials on the plateau who stayed at their posts, not only through the cold season, but for years and even decades at a time.. They were seen, at least in retrospect, as a dedicated, committed and idealistic contingent - the *lao xizangren* or Old Tibetans, as they are called, who followed the 18th Corps from Sichuan and the 1st Army from Xinjiang into Tibet as administrators, translators and cadres in the wake of the 1950 invasion. The implied praise now directed towards them in the light of the new wave of "winter worms" seems to set to one side recollections of the original politics of their cause, or their claims of liberation, or the devastation that in the leftist periods they wreaked, recalling instead their moral qualities of determination, fraternal idealism and hard work - in particular, the fact that many of them walked for six months to reach their new posts in Tibet, and, above all, the fact that some of them learnt to speak Tibetan and to become familiar with aspects of Tibetan culture. One of Chen's achievements was thus that by the strange alchemy of history he made that earlier wave of radical innovators and social revolutionaries seem in recollection to have been men of cultural charm and elegance, and, unlikely though it may seem, to have been at least partial admirers of tradition. That Chen achieved this was due mainly to two factors - firstly, to the brief but crucial re-emergence of Old Tibetans in the local leadership in the period shortly before Chen's arrival, and secondly to Chen's own drive against culture and tradition.

Tibetanisation and The Early 1980s

To describe these, I must go back a little in time, and attempt a more systematic organising of recent Tibetan history - speaking here of Tibet only in the limited, Chinese sense of what is now called the Tibet Autonomous Region (the T.A.R.). The generation of Old Tibetans, although they probably included many whom we would now consider leftists, had themselves lost power to the ultra-leftists during the Cultural Revolution, the period that Chinese official historians like to describe as lasting from 1966 to 1976. But the ascendancy of the reformer Deng Xiaoping and his leading acolyte Hu Yaobang after the death of Mao in 1976 had allowed a return to a more pragmatic approach to the engineering of social change. Hu Yaobang, in a famous visit to Lhasa in 1980, ordered the recall of one third of the Chinese officials then stationed there; in effect, this meant that many of the Old Tibetans remaining from the 1950s were to be returned to senior positions, including several who were in fact Tibetans from the East. Hu specifically ordered that even many Central Tibetans should be reinstated in the formal leadership, including some who had been aristocrats or lamas in the old regime; as a corollary, the children of those older dignitaries and other Tibetans according to their ability were to be given high quality educations which would enable them to take over roles in the administration.

The Tibetanisation process that ensued happened with astonishing speed, not a little because of the energy of the 10th Panchen Lama in pursuing Hu's initiatives, along with a remarkable cultural renaissance across the whole of ethnographic Tibet. This included a language law in 1987 that made Tibetan the official language of administration in the T.A.R. and which aimed to have Tibetan-medium education available at all levels by around the turn of the century. Chen has been regarded by some as synonymous with the widely known practices of abuse and violence against Tibetan dissidents that

followed the outbreak of pro-independence protests in 1987, but as we have seen, the beating and incarceration of nuns and others were already thoroughly institutionalised by the time of his arrival in Tibet. What was much more significant about his rule, and about the rise of the Winter Worms, was his systematic emasculating of the cultural and administrative reforms initiated by Hu Yaobang and the Panchen Lama in the early 1980s.

In fact, there is evidence that even by the time of the passing of the language law in 1987, a law that still awaits effective implementation, the return of the Old Tibetans and the Tibetanisation policy was already facing major opposition within the Party: reversal was well under way. The recalled Chinese cadres had been actively campaigning against their removal, and national policies mandating the dismissal of Cultural Revolution officials were never implemented in the TAR (partly at Hu's own instigation), with the result that some 25% of the 1980s leadership held uninterrupted positions from the Cultural Revolution era. A strong ideological movement resurfaced in the second half of the 1980s which called for a return to tougher controls on religion, cultural expression and policy making; by 1987 the much larger anti-bourgeois liberalisation movement in Beijing had led to the dismissal of Hu himself. It may have been this regression that in part provoked the demonstrations in Tibet, as people became aware that the 1980 reforms were increasingly coming under attack. An exceptional article in the official newspaper Tibet Daily, only published some time later, after its chief target, the Panchen Lama, had died, shows how at least one unidentified but clearly influential group regarded the policies that had been implemented in Tibet during the 1980s:

Over recent years Bourgeois Liberalisation has run rampant over ideology and political theory in all of our country, and without any doubt has also affected our Tibet. [...] After the ten year disaster of the Cultural Revolution and the errors of "leftism", the priority in politics was to make practical theoretical decisions both to negate leftist ideology and [the theme] of "taking class struggle as the key link". Since that time developments have not been as correct as was expected. From June 1979 to November 1985, though there were a great many speeches aimed at eliminating "leftism", among those hundreds of editorials and reviews there were only eight articles that stuck to the "Four Cardinal Principles" [the Supremacy of Socialism, and of Marxist-Leninism, the Democratic Dictatorship of the People, and the Leadership of the Party], all of which were published during the campaign for "the Elimination of Bourgeois Liberalisation". Over this long period theoretical and ideological emphasis has been on a discussion of "Re- understanding of Tibet" and "Proceeding in all Cases from the Reality of Tibet". Theoretical nationality and religion became the most popular subjects. [...] In a sense, the redeeming of political wrongs from the past made the socialist revolution in Tibet appear less significant. From time to time it was denied that in 1959 there had been a rebellion that required suppression, or that democratic reform followed. Yet no-one counter-attacked. Under the excuse of a major regional and national "special case", Marxism and Maoism were automatically [not conscientiously] listened to.

("Reflections on the Current State of Theoretical Policy in Tibet", *Xizang Ribao* (the Chinese language edition of Tibet Daily), 7th August 1989, under the name of "The Tibet Youth Association for Theory")

The retrenchment which Chen is seen as representing therefore predates him by several years at least as an ideological stance; his spiritual predecessors were already in position and active in Tibetan politics while he was still a minor bureaucrat in the Party School in Inner Mongolia, the area where he had been born and brought up. But call by the "The Tibet Youth Association for Theory" for a return to

a Marxist policy in Tibet was not taken up straight away in Tibet: although the wave of street demonstrations in Tibet after September 1987 allowed the local administrators to impose a much stricter regime on the area, including from March 1989 a thirteen month period of martial law, much of the reform policy and many of the newly appointed Tibetan leaders remained in place. Chen's predecessors at this time had too much to deal with, or perhaps did not dare to try to sweep the reform policies away; for one thing, in 1985 Hu Yaobang had appointed a reformer, Wu Jinghua, to be the Party Secretary of Tibet - as a member of the Yi nationality, he was the only Party Secretary of the TAR ever not to have been Chinese - and it was not until the spring of 1988 that hard-liners were able to get him removed on the grounds of "right deviationism" (Wu had famously antagonised the Chinese officials in the TAR opposed to Hu's reforms by wearing a Tibetan *chuba* or robe at public events, seen as encouraging Tibetan nationalism). For another thing, the Panchen Lama still enjoyed a senior and very public position in Beijing, and was uniquely courageous in what he was prepared to say in public about leftists; he died, however, in January 1989, a week after declaring publicly that Tibet had suffered more than it had gained from the Chinese presence of the previous 30 years.

Security and Economy

This has led me to propose a three phase interpretation of policy changes in Tibet during this period. The first phase, from 1987 to 1990, dealt primarily with security issues, or what Chinese leaders refer to as stability - in other words, how to stop demonstrations and unrest. It culminated in the imposition of martial law, a device which, as I have suggested elsewhere, was not so much to do with suppression of dissent in the classic sense of imprisonment, beatings and torture, all of which had been rampant in the previous two years but which in fact subsided while Tibet was under direct military rule, as with the institution of more sophisticated mechanisms of control. Most notable of these was the *zhengfengzhen* or identity card system, already widespread throughout China, which the martial law authorities were able to introduce into Lhasa and large parts of the T.A.R. in 1989. In addition, the informant system was strengthened and the decision was taken to move to a less provocative, low-profile form of military or police presence - this was the shift that the Chinese politicians referred to in internal documents of the time, and five years later in public documents also, as the move from "passive" to "active" policing: in effect, this meant "actively" using plainclothes police in small teams on the streets, with back-up troops off-street, and focussing on selective pre-emptive arrests of likely activists instead of "passively" staging large, armed patrols and shooting demonstrators after protests had broken out. By July 1990, when the new Party Secretary of China, Jiang Zemin, visited Lhasa, this "active" system was already in place and was beginning to show signs of effectiveness in stopping demonstrations from escalating into major incidents.

The second phase, from 1990 to 1995, began in earnest with Jiang's visit: accelerated economic development as a counter to Tibetan nationalism. This policy was symbolised by Jiang's slogan "grasping with both hands", a reference to combining the maintenance of stability with the promotion of development. Economic development was in part a continuation of earlier policies from Hu Yaobang's time, specifically of the Second Forum on Work in Tibet held in 1984, but now it was seen as an essential component of the security work - in other words, economic development was seen as a way of countering Tibetan nationalism because it would raise the standard of living in the region. This notion corresponded with a social determinist strand in Chinese Marxism which considered local nationalism to be a form of thinking analogous to religious belief - that is, a state of consciousness possible only in under-developed and economically less sophisticated communities than the modern Chinese society: once people have evolved to a higher economic plane, they would no longer be tempted by irredentist ideas. When Chen arrived in Tibet in March 1992, he inherited with evident

enthusiasm the policy of grasping with both hands, and it is to him that much of the energetic implementation of this notion of development as a form of control must be credited. He was to explain its rationale in numerous speeches:

Only with economic development and improvement of prestige of the country, and with people getting rich and tired of splittist groups can they finally make correct judgments and give up their purpose of splitting the country. Otherwise they will not drop their weapons. This is not up to the Dalai's personal will. [...] Stability and development in Tibet are preconditions to each other. If stability is maintained, the prerequisite of development has been secured. If the issue of development is solved in a satisfactory manner, stability will find a solid base. Stability is the precondition and development is of fundamental importance. If the economy develops well, the spiritual civilization will find a solid ground, and long-term stability within Tibet will be based on very reliable and solid ground. If there is no high-speed development of economy, the basis (for stability) will not be sturdy and far reaching. If the living standard of people is not high, they will not have interest in constructing their homeland, and cannot find much pleasure in their own life, and thus will be sympathetic with the religious illusion that places hope on the next life. With economic development their confidence in the country will be greatly increased, and the trend of unification and loving the central government will be enhanced.

(Chen Kuiyuan, "Requirements and hopes for the Third Working Meeting on Tibet", *Xizang de Jiaobu* (Tibet's Steps), Gaoji Ganbu Wenku (High Level Cadre Documents Series), Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe, Beijing, 1999, pp. 194, 196-197.)

Chen's policies, loyally inherited from Jiang Zemin, did indeed raise the standard of living in the T.A.R.: the GDP of the area reached double-digit growth shortly after his arrival and stayed at that level, and the average per capita income soared so that in the urban areas of Tibet it surpassed the average in inland China. Of course, this was achieved through massive investment of public funds, either from the Central Government or from the inland provinces of China, which were obliged from 1994 to dig deep into their pockets in order to finance infrastructural and other large-scale projects in Tibet. There had even been an announcement at the time of Chen's arrival that Tibet would be turned into a Special Economic Zone; it never came to pass and the dream of widespread foreign investment in the area remained largely a fiction. Instead, Chen used more simple methods to rush the Tibetan economy into a new stage: in April 1992 every government office with premises on a main street in Tibet was told to convert the street walls of their compounds into rows of tiny, garage-sized shops. At the same time; banks were told to give out low-interest loans to local entrepreneurs: the result was a sudden boom in petty urban private commerce. The boom was aimed at small Chinese traders - in December 1992 Chen ordered controls between the T.A.R. and other Chinese provinces to be removed, so that there would be no bar on the flow of migrants. By about 1994 the authorities had realised that it was in their interests to give such loans even to Tibetans instead of only to Chinese businessmen. Measures of this kind produced an uneven development focussed mainly on non-productive trade and services; the towns of Tibet as a result rapidly became the site of rows of cheap brothels and bars, and the class of Chinese immigrant traders, from street-sellers to luxury shop proprietors, expanded hugely; at the same time, the gap between the urban and the rural economies widened even further.

There was nothing incidental about the device of using Chinese immigrant traders to accelerate the economy: after some years of official denial and evasiveness, it became clear that bringing Chinese traders to Tibet in significant numbers was Chen's personal method for stimulating economic development in Tibet. By 1994 he was openly arguing the benefits of this policy:

All localities should have an open mind, and welcome the opening of various restaurants and stores by people from the hinterland. [...] They should not be afraid that people from the hinterland are taking their money or jobs away. Under a socialist market economy, Tibet develops its economy and the Tibetan people learn the skills to earn money when a hinterlander makes money in Tibet.

(Tibet People's Broadcasting Station, Lhasa, 28th November 1994, published in translation as "Tibet; Chen Kuiyuan in Qamdo Says Prosperity Will Drive Out Religion", BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB), 5th December 1994)

There was something much more controversial about this blunt approach to economics than merely the fact that it involved intentional demographic disruption. The economic policy initiated in the early 1980s by Hu Yaobang and nurtured by the Panchen Lama had also stressed development, but with an understanding that it should be led by Tibetans, or at least be directed towards advancing the interests of the Tibetan community in the area. This was not stated directly, but indicated through a coded phraseology, typical of Chinese political discourse, which used the term "special characteristics" to indicate this aim. The phrase was derived from the thinking of Deng Xiaoping, who had stressed that each area in China should develop according to practical, local contingencies; the notion therefore had some canonical sanction. In effect, it was used in 1980s Tibet to authorise the attempt to construct a Tibetan-oriented form of development. Chen's first task when he arrived in 1992, even before his presence had been publicly announced, was to destroy this notion of indigenous Tibetan priority in the economic sphere. He did this by taking advantage of another Dengist slogan, the so-called "spring tide". This was a call by Deng in early 1992 for rapid acceleration in the marketisation of the Chinese economy. In itself, there was nothing in the spring tide theory that contradicted the earlier notion of "special characteristics" but Chen and others were able to harness it to a powerful attack on those who wanted the Tibetan economy to be in the hands of Tibetans:

Is Tibet willing to accept the label of "being special" and stand at the rear of reform and opening up? Backwardness is not terrifying. Being geographically closed is not terrifying. What is terrifying is rigid and conservative thinking and the psychology of idleness.

(*Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily), 16th May 1994):

Chen later attacked support for the idea of Tibet-specific forms of economic development as a form of leftism:

A major obstacle to socialist economic construction and the implementation of profound reforms in Tibet is leftist ideas and outmoded ways of thinking. By leftist ideas we mean sticking to an economic mode that is outdated, runs counter to the conditions in China and stands in the way of the development of productive forces. After living and working for many years under this mode, we have got used to it and find it quite hard to free ourselves from its influence. Emancipation of the mind requires hard work over a long period of time. This is particularly true of Tibet, which is economically backward and has a closed market and where contacts and exchanges with the outside world are few and far between. Emancipation of the mind therefore requires even greater efforts in Tibet.

(Speech made at the Party Section Meeting within the [combined] Fourth Plenary Session of the Sixth T.A.R. Regional Congress and the Fourth Plenary Session of the Sixth T.A.R. Political Consultative Conference by Party Secretary Chen Kuiyuan, 14th May 1996)

The phrase "special characteristics" was rarely seen again in official speeches and statements from this time on, and the Tibetan economy became a largely Chinese affair. The new regime had under China dismantled in effect the central economic initiative of the Hu Yaobang era. In this way Chen achieved the economic mandate entrusted to him by Jiang Zemin - to grasp with both hands, or, in normal language, to end the pro-independence movement by artificially accelerating economic development. The method which Chen used to do this suggests, however, that his economic determinism - his claim that raising the level of the economy would automatically render Tibetan nationalism obsolete - was fictive or at best uncertain: He certainly raised the level of urban wealth in Tibet, but at the same time he rapidly increased the number of Chinese migrants in the area. In doing so he was using something similar to what we might call the Manchurian option - the method used in the late Qing era, at the end of the 19th century, when Chinese farmers were sent to settle along the banks of the Amur in order to feed the army and to man the borders against Russian incursion. In the 1920s a similar policy was used to repopulate Inner Mongolia, where Chen himself was brought up; in the 1950s a resettlement movement of former soldiers was established along the borders of Xinjiang with the Soviet Union, which now includes over a million settlers. The modern Tibetan version of this approach has the important difference that to date it involves semi-transient urban commerce rather than permanent rural settlement, at least in the T.A.R. But, in essence, Chen's policy, his version of "grasping with two hands", was a variant on the traditional deployment of China's excess rural population for the simultaneous management of economy and security in border regions.

The Third Phase: Religious and Cultural Control

In his security and economic policies Chen was carrying out the pre-existing orders of his superiors in Beijing, as far as we can tell. It is possible that his methods may have been more energetic and radical than had been envisaged - this at least is how it appeared to observers. Chen's "Request to Convene the Third Worker's Forum on Tibet to Ensure a Prosperous Tibetan Economy and Long Term Peace and Stability" shows how he appealed to the central leadership for his methods to be approved and financed, as indeed they were. The document, only published some five years later, gives the impression (as presumably its publishers intended) that he had successfully advised the central Chinese leadership on Tibet policy and had had his approach sanctioned, probably through those leaders whom we believe to have been his personal patrons, Hu Jintao (who, before being elevated to national status, had briefly preceded Chen as T.A.R. Party Secretary during the martial law era) and Li Ruihuan, the Party's chief of nationality and religious affairs.

We should be determined to break the secluded environment and to guarantee a smooth access of people and materials in and out of Tibet and promote the economic connection and friendly communication between Tibet and the inland areas. We should provide Tibetan people more opportunities to communicate with the inland population of all nationalities and to understand deeply and love the big family of our country. We should improve the economic living standard in Tibet, and improve the exploitation of resources. [...] We request the central authorities to arrange a large number of construction projects.

(Chen Kuiyuan, "Request to Convene the Third Worker's Forum on Tibet to Ensure a Prosperous Tibetan Economy and Long Term Peace and Stability", *Xizang de Jiaobu*, Beijing, 1999, pp. 118ff.)

But if any of his policies were his own creation, it is most likely to have been those that emerged in the third phase of post-1987 policy in Tibet: the phase of cultural control. This phase consisted of two sectors - one dealing with the religion and the other with culture in the sense of scholarship, the educational syllabus, and the portrayal of history. It was in this second area that Chen developed strategies and rhetoric which had not been seen in the Tibetan arena before his arrival. They were, however, indeed predicted in his request for the Third Forum to be held, a request made less than a year after his arrival, and duly sanctioned by Beijing when the Third Forum was held in July 1994 - that, anyway, is the impression given by the collection of speeches and memoranda published in 1999, which (it has been suggested) was partly designed, especially in its second edition, to show that Chen was well-prepared in all his major moves, and perhaps even ahead of his Beijing superiors:

Especially there are a large number of excellent Tibetan cadres who have played a special role. At the same time of supporting this mainstream, we also must realise the problems existing in our contingencies with a sober mind: we should first reach a consensus within the party and solve the problem of the stance of the party members and cadre. There are some party members and cadres whose view of nationalities and view of religion is not "a clear line" [separating them] from the Dalai clique. And there are also a few cadres who secretly collaborate with the splittist clique. There are some party organizations and governments at the basic level who do not stand their ground and submit at the county level, who dare not struggle with illegal temples, schools at all levels and all kinds, and some cultural departments are not firm in the leadership of promoting educational ideology and who have not taken the initiative of struggling for the next generation.

(Chen Kuiyuan, "Request to Convene the Third Worker's Forum on Tibet to Ensure a Prosperous Tibetan Economy and Long Term Peace and Stability", *Xizang de Jiaobu*, Beijing, 1999, pp. 118ff.)

Whatever might have been said until then by opponents of Chinese rule in Tibet, the decision to attack Tibetan religion or culture *per se* was unprecedented in the post-reform era. Of course it was true that police stations had been erected in the major monasteries, religious teachings had been restricted, and the language policies of the Panchen Lama had not been implemented, but these were in essence uncoordinated security moves and restrictions: they were not a policy attack on Tibetan culture or religion as a whole. In this sense, the 1980s reform dispensation was still theoretically in place as far as culture and religion were concerned, albeit hemmed in by numerous and erratic restrictions. The theoretical right of Tibetans to develop their culture and religion as much as circumstances allowed remained intact, however difficult it was in practice to carry out. Above all, the religious standing of the Dalai Lama was not in doubt - although constantly criticised for his political views, his religious position remained sacrosanct. It was Chen's achievement to change all this, to sweep away the notion that Tibetan culture and religion were too sensitive to be openly targeted for political and ideological control, just as he had proved for the first time in the reform era that Chinese immigration into Tibet could be openly encouraged as an aim of policy.

The Anti-Dalai Lama Campaign

The outside world had no inkling of this radical move until it became public policy in 1995, but it appears from the 1993 document that the attack on Tibetan religious culture was a carefully staged affair almost from the time of Chen's appointment. The first, tentative signs of a policy shift appeared in May 1994 when Party members in Tibet were reminded of the Party's commitment to atheism and told to remove any altars, rosaries, Dalai Lama pictures or signs of religious devotion from their homes. This was not an insignificant ruling: as recently as January 1991 - a year before Chen's arrival in Lhasa - the Tibet Daily had carried an article arguing at length that Party members in Tibet should be allowed to practise religion. In the last week of May 1994 government officials - including those who were not party members - were told that no photographs of the Dalai Lama would be allowed in their offices or vehicles. In the second week of June further meetings were held in government departments forbidding display of the photograph. In July the ban was extended to cover semi-official agencies, including tourist agencies, business co-operatives and taxi companies. At the end of August notices were circulated in Lhasa offices which made it clear that the ban had been extended to apply not just to the offices but also to the homes of government employees. On 28th September that year police for the first time confiscated Dalai Lama photographs that were on sale in Lhasa markets: this marked the extension of the campaign from officials to ordinary Tibetans. These moves were not publicly declared, and it was only from January 1995 that the newspapers began to carry lengthy articles attacking the Dalai Lama's religious standing. These attacks were elaborations of the internal rulings made by the Third Forum, which had been circulated among Party members the previous September:

We must be able to reveal the true colours of the Dalai clique. Due to the traditional religion, Dalai has a certain prestige amongst monks, nuns and devotees. But Dalai and the Dalai clique have defected and escaped to a foreign country, and have turned into a splittist political clique hoping to gain Tibet's independence and have become a tool of international hostile forces. [...] The struggle between ourselves and the Dalai clique is not a matter of religious belief nor a matter of the question of autonomy, it is a matter of securing the unity of our country and opposing splittism.

("Document No.5: Seize this Good Opportunity of Having 'The Third Forum' [and] Achieve in an All- Round Way a New Aspect on Work in Tibet," a speech given by Deputy Party Secretary Ragdi on September 5, 1994 at the Seventh Plenum of the Sixth Standing Committee Session of the T.A.R. Communist Party; an official public summary of this speech by Ragdi was printed in the Chinese language version of Tibet Daily on September 6, 1994, with an English translation was published by the BBC in SWB, September 26, 1994; reproduced in more detail in the *Dus rabs gsar par skyod-pa'i gser zam* ("A Golden Bridge Leading Into a New Era"), subtitled "reference materials to publicize the spirit of the Third Forum on Work in Tibet", the Propaganda Committee of the TAR Communist Party, Tibetan People's Publishing House, October 1, 1994).

In other words, the Centre had formulated an explanation for ignoring the distinction between the religious and political aspects of the Dalai Lama; their decision was described more direct language by the *Tibet Daily* a month later: "To sum up, the Dalai is no longer a religious leader. He has degenerated from being the leader of a rebellion against the motherland into a naked anti-China tool who has bartered away his honour for Western hostile forces' patronage" (Li Bing, "Dalai is a tool of hostile forces in the West", *Xizang Ribao*, Lhasa, 11th December 1995, p.2, published in translation by the BBC SWB as "Tibet Daily' Calls Dalai Lama 'Tool' of West", 8th January 1996). The religious concession to the Dalai Lama's religious status that had in effect been granted by Deng Xiaoping in

1979 had been withdrawn . Chen was later to hint in an internal speech that the leadership before him had failed by not taking this step earlier:

The Dalai clique's capability in creating damage is to some degree also a reflection of our failures in recognition, in striking power, and in political discrimination. Some party members believe that denouncing the Dalai would offend God and the masses; they not only [do not] engage in the struggle, but also uphold differences between the struggle of the masses and that of party; this is completely incorrect. Communists are atheists. If we see the Dalai as a religious ideal and avoid denouncing him in the process of the anti-splittist campaign, then politically we will not be able to lead the masses to fight effectively against the splittist group headed by him. We must denounce him fundamentally and not recognise his religious authority.

(Speech made at the Party Section Meeting within the [combined] Fourth Plenary Session of the Sixth T.A.R. Regional Congress and the Fourth Plenary Session of the Sixth T.A.R. Political Consultative Conference by Party Secretary Chen Kuiyuan, 14th May 1996)

The T.A.R. leaders waited, however, another year before moving to the stage of full implementation of their new policy - imposing it on the monks. This came on 5th April 1996, when the Tibet Daily formally announced the ban on public display of Dalai Lama photographs:

The hanging of the Dalai's portrait in temples should gradually be banned. We should convince and educate the large numbers of monks and ordinary religious believers that the Dalai is no longer a religious leader who can bring happiness to the masses, but a guilty person of the motherland and people."

(*Xizang Ribao*, 5th April 1996, p.1)

It was a high risk decision, and led to major conflict in at least one monastery (Ganden), where a monk was shot dead by troops suppressing protests against the ban. It was followed by a massive exercise in political education (called the *dgon sde'i nang rgyal bces ring lugs kyi slob gso spel ba* or "Carrying Out Patriotic Education in all Monasteries") across the entire region, with teams of officials sent to every monastery and nunnery in Tibet to extract written compliance from all monks and nuns with the denunciation of the Dalai Lama; more importantly, new administration committees were set up in each monastery, sometimes with lay or even party membership. Hundreds of monks and nuns were expelled from their institutions or fled to India, and a few were imprisoned following small incidents of protest, but by the time Chen left office four years later he was able to claim that his drive to curb monastic unrest had been successfully enforced without significant repercussions.

The Attack on Intellectual Culture

Chen's religious policy was aggressive and uncompromising, but it was his larger attitude to Tibetan culture in its more intellectual aspects that was to prove most provocative to Tibetans. It was understandable that he would target the Dalai Lama as an enemy, but he went much further than this. Firstly, he ruled that not only monks and nuns should be forced to renounce the Dalai Lama, but that government officials like party members should be obliged to renounce any form of religious practice. By 1997 he had ordered this ruling to be extended to the family members of officials, and to officials at any level of the administration, including drivers, janitors, caretakers and the like. At about the same period - no clear date is known for the promulgation of this order, since it too was never made public -

he had the rule extended to all students and schoolchildren. In doing this, he went way beyond any pragmatic argument based about religious belief or worship of the Dalai Lama being unacceptable for officials or monks for security reasons: this could not be argued in the case of children. He had overturned the promise of religious freedom made in the Chinese Constitution. This excess finally led to him being criticised (extremely mildly) by the Chinese leader Lan Lanqing during the latter's visit to Lhasa in August 2000, weeks before Chen was removed from his position in Tibet. But it was a speech he gave in July 1997 on legitimate art, acceptable tradition and the role of Buddhism in Tibetan culture that made him notorious among Tibetans:

In inheriting traditional culture, we must distinguish the essence from the dross and continue to create something new. [...] Some people say that the Tibetan national culture is connected to religion in form and essence. Some others say that college teaching material will be void of substance if religion is not included and that in that case, colleges would not be real colleges. If what such people talked about were a Buddhist college, I would have no comment. But what they refer to is a Tibet University, so they have no reason whatsoever to make such an allegation. After all, is the Tibetan national culture equivalent to a Buddhist culture? If one should say that the Tibetan national culture came into being after Buddhist culture, one would have shorten the history of Tibetan civilization by more than 1,000 years. As is known to all, there was no Buddhism in Tibet over a long period of time. Buddhism came into being only a little over 2,500 years ago. [...] Is only Buddhism Tibetan culture? It is utterly absurd. Buddhism is a foreign culture. If it is said that the Tibetan nationality had no culture before the arrival of Buddhist culture, is it not said that the Tibetan people used to be a nationality without a culture? The view of equating Buddhist culture with Tibetan culture not only does not conform to reality but also belittles the ancestors of the Tibetan nationality and the Tibetan nationality itself. I just cannot understand that. Some people, claiming to be authorities, have made such shameless statements confusing truth and falsehood. Comrades who are engaged in research on Tibetan culture should be indignant at such statements. Making use of religion in the political field, separatists now go all out to put religion above the Tibetan culture and attempt to use the spoken language and culture to cause disputes and antagonism between nationalities, and this is the crux of the matter."

(Chen Kuiyuan, *Xizang Ribao*, 16th July 1997 pp. 1,4; published in translation by the BBC SWB as "Tibet party secretary Chen Kuiyuan speaks on literature, art", 1st August 1997).

In the same speech Chen made a bizarre and unprecedented announcement that the 17th century Tibetan writer and politician Sangye Gyatso was "a separatist chieftain" whom it was no longer permitted to praise. There was no particular reason for the Party Secretary to issue bans on the study or description of incidental historical figures: it seemed rather to be a sign that Chen, after much study and reading, had familiarised himself with Tibetan history and was now prepared to take on Tibetan scholars and intellectuals publicly, something that his predecessors had not attempted, as far as we know. There was a deeper theoretical shift behind this: it was whispered later that Chen had made a statement at an internal meeting 18 months earlier saying that Tibetan nationalism was rooted in Tibetan religion, and that Tibetan religion was rooted in Tibetan culture and language: if so, this was his most far-reaching contribution to contemporary Party policy-making. This theory implied that Tibetan culture and language had to be restricted or at least closely monitored as well as Tibetan religion: this was a radical departure from existing policies. Shortly afterwards, the experimental Tibetan-medium school classes that had been started by the Panchen Lama some six years earlier in four secondary schools were closed down, the offices in charge of Tibetan translation were

downgraded, the Tibetan Department of Tibet University was told to suspend all intake while it revised its textbooks, and a number of distinguished Tibetan scholars were instructed to take early retirement. This was not a policy of eliminating wholesale Tibetan intellectual culture - in fact the Centre decided in 1999 that in order to combat exile and foreign allegations that Tibetan culture was being destroyed large amounts of money should be spent setting up showcase departments of Tibetan language and history in Lhasa, Chengdu and elsewhere. But clearly a decision had been made to corral and to emasculate the higher reaches of Tibetan intellectual endeavour. Chen had taken on Tibetan scholar directly, even though there was no suggestion that they were directly involved in threats to China's security, and even though there had been no call for a purge of this sort in the internal rulings of the Third Forum, which were supposedly Chen's policy guidelines. This, the third phase of China's post-1980s policy regime in Tibet, the attack on the cultural front, was not therefore some attempt to eliminate Tibetan culture (as if such a thing were possible), but it was a concerted effort to contain or eviscerate its integrity in the areas of scholarship and education; in addition, it represented an important shift in Chinese ideology about the rights of minority cultures. Above all, it represented the final stage in the programmatic dismantling of the reforms put together by the Panchen Lama and others during the time of Hu Yaobang in the early and mid-1980s.

The Legacy

When eventually Chen was criticised for exceeding his policy brief, as indicated by Li Lanqing's mild speeches during his visit to Lhasa, it was (or so it is rumoured) for having extended the ban on religious practice to the non-immediate family members of government officials in the summer of 2000. It was not for the attacks on high culture or the extraordinary ban on religious belief among students and children: these have remained intact, even after Chen was re-appointed to his new position of Party Secretary in Henan Province in Central China these policies remained in place. In July 2001 Tibetan scholars were told by Chen's successor Guo Jinlong, quoting Chen and his infamous July 1997 speech on cultural policy, that the priorities of their work were to remain unchanged, namely to attack "the Dalai" and his followers:

The people and the era definitely show that there are two clear requirements concerning the responsibilities to be carried on the shoulders of [those involved in studies relating to Tibet]: firstly, they absolutely must have a clear view and correct and firm line. The correct and firm line must absolutely be that they must protect and defend the unity of the Chinese state, society and people, and [they must] protect and defend the unification of the 56 nationalities of China. Concerning this principle they must not get even a single hair out of place.

(Bod rjongs nyin re'i tshag par, Tibet Daily, Tibetan language edition, 11th July, 2001)

It remains unclear whether Chen's removal from Tibet represented any significant criticism by his superiors; the fact that he was given the important position of Party Secretary in Henan suggests that his policies were in general approved. Guo Jinlong's later speech on the political requirements of Tibetology makes it clear that at least Chen's policies towards culture and scholarship had been accepted as part of China's standard policies for Tibet.

Chen's legacy, however, is more than the creation of a form of political ideology which identified Tibetan culture as antagonistic to the state, a presumption which he has bequeathed to Tibet's subsequent rulers. He also created a style of administration which had distinctive hallmarks, and which look likely to remain part of China's style of borderland rule. This style included three elements which

might have appeared at first to outside readers to be largely rhetorical in nature, but which in practice had major consequences on the ground. Firstly, he perfected the technique of manipulating central policies and campaigns so that they would suit his local political objectives - thus, for example, he was able to transform Deng Xiaoping's Spring 1992 drive for a marketisation of the economy in China into a justification for state-encouraged migration of Chinese workers into Tibet. Similarly, the anti-corruption campaign of 1997 was turned by him into an attack on religious beliefs among Tibetan cadres. Thus his rhetoric is filled with lavish praise for central policies promulgated as part of China's national drive for modernisation, while in fact distorting them to serve local needs, in particular the suppression of the Tibetan cadre force.

Secondly, he developed the technique, already commonplace among officials in Inner Mongolia, as the Mongolian scholar Uradyn Bulag has shown elsewhere, of using the exaggeration of local threats to justify his hold on power - in other words, by constantly declaring that there was a threat to Tibet from "the Dalai", he was able to maximise his demand for special resources and funds from the centre, and to justify his anachronistic mix of authoritarianism and marketisation of the economy. This is, among all, the most characteristic feature of Chen's prose: the maximisation of the "splittist" threat. In fact, there is virtually no evidence of significant unrest in the region since around 1996; popular discontent Chinese rule with appears to have been widespread in Tibet in this period, but it rarely manifested as public confrontation). His use of this form of rhetoric in his Tibetan speeches and reports must therefore have been a device to ensure his continued hold on power, and to enable him to pressurise the central authorities to continue their flow of extraordinary funding to the region: it was a scare tactic designed to mislead the Beijing leadership and to authorise his politics of intimidation in Tibet.

A third characteristic of his leadership style was his endemic distrust of Tibetans, most especially the Tibetan cadres and traditional leaders: all his campaigns can be seen as direct or indirect ways of trying to test and identify those Tibetans within the ranks of officials who were what he termed "hidden reactionaries" - thus his campaign to ensure the rejection of the Dalai Lama's choice of the 11th Panchen Lama involved each Tibetan official and leader giving public statements of loyalty; his "patriotic education" drive in the monasteries were tests of the vast numbers of Tibetan officials sent to extract denunciations of their exile leader from the monks and nuns. In addition, he studied hard to master at least some of the ideas of the local scholars and intellectuals whom he wished to combat.

In his introduction to his poetry collection, published in 1999, he drew a parallel between his own work in the borderlands and that of the Chinese military official and poet Gao Shi, posted in a remote border area of China more than a thousand years ago. Perhaps, therefore, Chen's style of administration - consistently exaggerated reports to the centre of local unrest, distortion of central policies to serve his need to carry out local crack-downs, management through migration, inflation of the petty urban economy, aggressive control of religion, and confrontation with local scholars - is in the tradition of the Chinese frontier-administrator. It is, perhaps, more likely that his style derives not from some imagined Tang dynasty model but from the border officials of the late Qing or Republican eras, especially those Inner Mongolian frontier administrators among whom he was brought up and trained. Similarities are thus more likely to be found with the infamous "butcher of Sichuan", Zhao Erfeng, in the early 20th century than with the poet-scholar Gao Shi. It will take further study, and in particular close readings of his newly published writings and poems, to see which tradition he represents. For Tibetans, however, the analogies are both more distant and more recent. "Chen", one Tibetan student told me jokingly, recalling the 9th century persecutor of early Buddhism, "is the reincarnation of Langdarma". Other Tibetans, as we have seen, view Chen as the paramount winter-worm - the epitome of the new generation of opportunist, short-term technocratic Chinese officials that emerged in the

1990s. But however much his style of leadership is scorned, it was neither ineffective nor insignificant: by the time of his departure for Henan in October 2000 he left behind him a barely recognisable skeleton of the 1980 reforms, an emasculated monasticism, an intimidated intelligentsia, and a radically transformed Tibet.