Red Tibet: An Investigation Into The Chinese Occup Essay, Research Paper

Red Tibet: an investigation into theChinese occupation of Tibet. For thousands of years, the people of Tibet lived in anarea of the world that was secluded enough to provide anenvironment in which traditions, religion and customs couldendure the test of time. Having a long and colorful history,the Tibetans were everything from fierce warriors to a peoplewhose deep spirituality has inspired many. The Tibetans weretruly an industrious people when it came to something inwhich they took a deep interest. If it was war, the Tibetansmastered its art. If it was religion, the Tibetans masteredthat as well. After many years of studying, they mastered theMahayana Buddhism of the Indians and took it to a higherlevel. The result was a new vehicle of Buddhism calledVajrayana. As one can see, the Tibetans seem to be a veryable people that do not let anything stand in their way. Thisis why it is particularly frustrating to see the ugly veil ofCommunism masking such a vibrant and peace loving people. It is the goal of this paper to look at how the Chinesetook Tibet as well as look at the political history of thetakeover. An account will be given of the military history as Brown 2well as how China consolidated its power. Finally, there willbe an investigation into the validity of China s claim aswell as the question of why China continues to hold on to a region of the world that obviously does not welcome its rule. To begin with, Tibet thought of itself as a sovereigncountry ever since the Manchu dynasty fell in 1911 (Karan17). Since that time, the government of Tibet was ruled by aregent and a Kashag, or High Council –all of whom weresubject to the Dalai Lama. The members of the Kashag includedthe army commander-in-chief, the senior nobles and the seniorlamas. For all intents and purposes, the Dalai Lama wieldedabsolute temporal and spiritual power throughout Tibet (15). The Chinese began to mobilize against Tibet in thewinter of 1949 (15). They trained in the mountains ofSzechwan and anticipated heavy fighting in treacherousconditions. Some of the party were even taught the Tibetanlanguage and customs in hopes that they could be used tonegotiate a peace settlement early, and give orders later. OnOctober 7, 1950, the Chinese started towards the Tibetanplateau, and, in four days, reached Ning-Ching. AtNing-Ching, a Tibetan border regiment defected to the Chinesewithout a shot being fired. Having made quick work of thefringe Tibetan troops, the Chinese continued to press westtowards Chamdo –around 400 miles from Lhasa (15). The Eastern Tibetan borderlands were not a match to Brown 3General Chang Kuo-hua of the Peoples Liberation Army. Infact, by exploiting the traditional rift between the PanchenLama and the Dalai Lama, the general was able to inductthousands of Tibetan Panchen Lama supporters into thePeoples Army. Responding to the oncoming threat, the DalaiLama mobilized a small army of possibly 10-12,000 men andsent them out to meet the Chinese before they reached thecapital. This small Tibetan army was so badly equipped thatit still had guns that were given to Tibet by England fromthe days of British India! Be that as it may, the Tibetansmarched off, mostly out of sheer fanatical courage (15). As the Tibetan army reached Chamdo, they entrenchedthemselves in what would seem to be very defendable terrain.The mountains and sharp cliffs of this area of the world madeChamdo almost as strategic and easy to defend as theDardanelles. It is quite possible that this small army wouldhave made invasion very tough on the Chinese had they notfallen for an optical illusion. As night fell on October 19,1950, the Tibetan soldiers settled in to sleep –fullyexpecting a more orthodox daylight attack by the Chinese.Instead, around midnight, the sky started to light up withthe glare of exploding rockets and star-shells. In a panic,the people of Chamdo began to flee into the streets and begthe Chinese for mercy. With that, the Tibetan general turnedaround and headed back towards Lhasa to warn of the eminent Brown 4danger. The result of all of this was that Tibet s only realchance to defend themselves against the Chinese fell shortbecause they were duped by a fireworks display. The People sArmy took Chamdo without a single shot being fired (17). When the Tibetan general arrived back at Lhasa and toldthem what had happened in Chamdo, the government, uncertainof what to do, did what it always had in these situations andcalled the State Oracle. The Oracle advised that the DalaiLama should flee the country at once. Before going, however,the Dalai Lama dissolved the regency and made Himself fullleader of Tibet. The Dalai Lama then retreated to Yatung –asmall town near the Indian border, but not quite out ofTibet s borders (17). By this time, it seemed that the Chinese were going tomake quick work of the whole country. One group of thePeoples Army marched toward Lhasa while a second groupmarched across the Kunlun Range and occupied most of westernTibet. From Chamdo on to Lhasa, the Chinese encountered noreal resistance of any type. The only real problem was the terrain itself. Because of the swift movement of theChinese troops, and the fact that the United Nations andother leading nations such as India the United Kingdom neveranswered Tibet s cry for help, the Dalai Lama was forced tomake a quick decision. He had three options open to Him. Thefirst one was that He could go ahead and complete His journey Brown 5across the border into India. The second option was that Hecould head back to Lhasa and try to form a last-ditch effortarmy. Since He didn t want to just abandon His country andbecause He knew anymore resistance would be futile, His onlyother option was to capitulate to the Chinese (19). In late December, 1950, the Dalai Lama sent a peacedelegation to China that did not end negotiations until Mayof 1951 when the two nations signed a 17-point agreement.This, interestingly enough, was the first treaty to be signedby these two nations in over 1,130 years. The agreementallowed Tibet to govern itself under the leadership of theDalai Lama, but gave China military control and the right toconduct foreign relations. Furthermore, the agreementguaranteed the rights of the Panchen Lama and flared up theold rivalry once more (20). The Dalai Lama went back to Lhasa in 1951 with anagreement that He thought was livable at best. It did nottake long, however, before the Chinese reneged on theagreement. Once the Dalai Lama was seemingly back in power,the Chinese decided to separate Tibet into three zones. Thesmallest zone, Central Tibet, was ruled by the Dalai Lama,the Shigatse zone was ruled by the Panchen Lama and Chinaruled the Eastern Chamdo zone. This enabled the Chinese toenter and indoctrinate the eastern parts of Tibet as well asthe area that the Panchen Lama ruled –as he was merely a Brown 6Chinese puppet (21). Ever the optimist, the Dalai Lama tried to make the bestout of what seemed to be turning into a deterioratingsituation. In late 1951, He received Chinese emissaries who

proposed such things as schools, roads, hospitals and somelight industry. Much of this was met by enthusiasm from boththe Dalai Lama and the people of Tibet who initially welcomeda brake from the feudal past. The Dalai Lama also made aconcerted effort to meet the Chinese half way, so to speak,with their new form of government. In 1954, He made a sixmonths visit to China and listened in on lectures that werebeing given on Marxism, Leninist and Maoism. Several times,He met with both Mao and the Panchen Lama to try to work outtheir differences. On the 23rd of September, 1954 the DalaiLama was obviously feeling good about his Chinesecounterparts as he is quoted as saying… A close unity isgrowing daily among fraternal nationalities, in particular,between the Han (Chinese) and Tibetan people; a new andpeaceful and friendly atmosphere now prevails in Tibet (Peissel 59). Things were not as good as the Dalai Lama thought,however, as the Tibetans began to really feel the icy grip ofChinese-style Communism. Throughout Tibet, people were beingrun off of their land in order to make room for new AutoHighways . In Chamdo, new Chinese settlers were so numerous Brown 7that food prices soared. It was in this region that a smallgroup of dissidents called the Khambas began to initiate arevolt. In April of 1955, the Dalai Lama was finally makinghis way back to Lhasa when he stopped in Chamdo to urge theKhambas to accept whatever is good in the Chinese methods .News of initial success, however, stopped His words frommaking any sense to the Khambas as a cry of war resoundedthroughout Kham. By late 1955, the Chinese successfully putdown the rebel movement and now exerted full military andgovernmental control throughout all of the eastern zone (94). In late 1955, a Preparatory Committee for the Formationof the Autonomous Region of Tibet was established (Karan25). The purpose of this committee, supposedly, was to worktowards what the Dalai Lama thought would be independentstatehood. This committee was made up of the Dalai Lama sgovernment, the Panchen Lama s council, the Peoples Liberation Committee of the Chamdo Region, major monasteries,other Tibetan organizations and Chinese government personnelin Tibet. The problem was that most of the appointed Tibetanswere Chinese puppets intent on getting rid of the Dalai Lamaaltogether (24). The Committee established several agenciesincluding civil administration, finance, health, thejudiciary, agriculture, trade and industry, transportationand construction –all run by Chinese personnel. What this Brown 8accomplished for the Chinese is that it pretty much wrestedall power from the Dalai Lama and succeeded in infuriatedmost Tibetans as they were now aware that the Chinesecontrolled most of their affairs. Because of all of theseimperialistic actions taken by the Chinese, the Tibetansstarted to organize resistance groups. The most popular ofthese groups was the Mimang (25). In early 1959, the Mimang counted over 300,000supporters in its ranks. Its charges against the Chinesegovernment were as follows: the taking of grain, destructionof thousands of acres of farmland, the seizure of land andits allocation to Chinese immigrants, slave labor, thepersecution of lamas and monks and forced indoctrination incommunism (25). All of this frustration finally led to theLhasa uprising in March of 1959. This uprising started asrumors started to fly that the Chinese government wasmobilizing its troops to invade Lhasa and execute the DalaiLama (Peissel 140-45). In response to these rumors, numerousgun wielding Tibetans surrounded the Potala Palace in orderto protect His Holiness. However, the event would have allbut dissipated –since this rogue group of dissidents failedto form a united front against the Chinese– if it weren tfor the Khambas who were still agitated by being crushed byChina a few years earlier. Numerous Khamba-led battles tookplace to the south of Lhasa as the Chinese began to send Brown 9large armies in the direction of Lhasa (Peissel 140-45). OnMarch 17, 1959, the Dalai Lama was urged by His council toflee to India in order to seek asylum. That night, dressed asa common monk, He successfully crossed the border into India.At this time, China dissolved all of what was once the nationof Tibet and ruled over it with an iron fist (140-45). Since that day in 1959, the country of Tibet has beenheld captive by the Chinese while the Tibetan government hasbecome a government in exile. Inasmuch as the United Nationsvoted in October of 1959 that Tibet had, indeed, beenviolated, questions still loom over the validity of China sclaim to Tibet. There is evidence both for and againstChinese rule. First of all, it is widely held by the Chinesethat Tibet is a natural part of mainland China (Peissel,18-19). Furthermore, China claims that it has had a voice inthe government of Tibet since the days of the Manchu dynasty.The most insulting assertion, however, is the claim by Chinathat it is their duty as a friendly neighbor to take theTibetans over in order to help them modernize and bringthemselves up to date . The evidence supporting a free Tibet is much moreconvincing. First of all, the Tibetans are not ethnicallyrelated to the Chinese at all. The Tibetans are actuallyIndo-Europeans who migrated from Central Asia thousands of Brown 10years ago. Second of all, since the days of Songtsen Gampo,Tibet had its own government, issued its own passports,signed its own treaties, issued its own postage stamps andprinted its own money (Peissel 18). Furthermore, byinternational law, if the Tibetans ever entered into a treatywith a sovereign nation, then it should be consideredindependent. This happened back in 1904 when the LhasaConvention was signed between Tibet and England concerningtrade between Tibet and British India. Finally, Tibet wasasked by numerous nations during World War II to give up itsneutrality in order to let ammunition pass through itsborders. By doing this, these nations –the US, Britain,India, Japan and a few others– unwittingly recognized Tibetas an independent country. As one can see, the evidence forTibet s independence greatly outweighs China s petty attemptsat justification. In conclusion, The country of Tibet has endured quite abit of hardships in the past 40 years –to say the least. Notonly was it stripped of its sovereignty, but also itstraditions and culture. Even though there seems to be clearevidence that Tibet is truly an independent nation, Chinaseems content to keep things as they are. Many people overthe years have made comparisons with Tibet to the situationin N. Ireland. The difference, however is that N. Ireland sprospects for independence are much better than Tibet s. The Brown 11sad truth of the matter is that Tibet is looked upon by Chinaas a land rich in natural resources and as a strategicoutpost on the Indian border. With India s recent test ofnuclear weapons as well as Pakistan s awaited tests , itremains doubtful that China will soon give Tibet up. Perhapsthe best course of action that the Tibetans can take at thistime is to support the efforts of the Dalai Lama and Hisgovernment in exile in seeking a peaceful end to thishorrible atrocity. Bibliography Karan, Pradyumna P. The Changing Face Of Tibet.University of Kentucky Press. Lexington, Ky. 1976. Peissel, Michel. The Secret War In Tibet. Little, Brown& Co., Boston, Ma. 1972. \*\*Various information was taken from the TibetanGovernment In Exile web page which can be found atWWW.Tibet.com.