
Himalayan Asia

In late 1951, over eight thousand Chinese soldiers arrived in Lhasa, marking a new era for the capital.¹ During this time, Lhasa, like many cities in the early phases of occupation by a new political force, was a city of contradictions, political machinations, and cultural clashes. Following Mao Zedong's explicit instructions, the Chinese government adopted a gradualist approach. As Goldstein describes it, the Chinese officials in Lhasa "set out to develop cooperative and cordial relationships with the elite and to convince them that these officials had come to Tibet to help them modernize and develop, not to oppress and exploit them, as previous Chinese regimes had done."²

Although post-1951 Tibet is often presented either as a case of state-sponsored Chinese "liberation" or as a case of Tibetan oppression and resistance, recent scholarship has begun to avoid such polarized interpretations.³ Nowhere is this revisionist perspective on Tibet's past more visible than in the years immediately following the arrival of Chinese forces.⁴ New evidence and oral histories from this period suggest that Tibetan autonomy in many spheres of life persisted well into the mid-1950s. Lhasa's social calendar—Tibetan Buddhist rituals, daily prayers, and constant flow of pilgrims—proceeded largely unabated. The Kashag, the Tibetan governing council, and Tibetan monasteries persevered institutionally. The Dalai Lama carried on in his central role in the institutional and cultural life of the city while serving as the primary mediator between the realities of Chinese control and the limitations of Tibetan authority. Republican-era Chinese silver dollars continued to serve as the legal tender in central Tibet, making Tibet the only administrative region in the People's Republic of China (PRC) not to have "People's money" (Ch. *renminbi*) as its primary currency.⁵ In many ways, life

improved. Spared the monetary transition to Chinese currency, Chinese officials and soldiers generally received wages in and paid for goods with silver dollars, adding a new stream of revenue for central Tibet.⁶ Yet even as these recent perspectives have become more widely accepted, Tibet's experiences typically are seen in isolation from China's post-liberation and more broadly Asia's postcolonial history.⁷

The lingering tendency to isolate narratives of Tibet's past from mainstream accounts of Asia's past is peculiar, since many of the seminal forces that shaped Tibet, particularly in the 1950s, emerged out of the same complex postcolonial historical trends that swept across Asia after World War II. Unlike the experiences of Europe and the United States, where victory over Nazi Germany in May 1945 marked the beginning of the Cold War era, in Asia the defeat of Japan ushered in an extended period of decolonization and political change. There was China's civil war between Nationalist and Communist forces, culminating in a sweeping Communist victory in 1949; India's independence from Great Britain, precipitating the traumatic partition of India and Pakistan in 1947; and the creation of nearly a dozen new nations in Southeast Asia, ushering in a period of intense patriotic nationalism. In each of these instances, the citizens of these newly formed nations grappled anew with what it meant to be Chinese, Indian, Malaysian, Indonesian, or Thai. Similarly, overseas populations of peoples who had permanently settled outside their ancestral homelands found their identities challenged in new and often fraught ways. While becoming manifest in different ways, 1950s Tibet's responses to the newly delineated territorial, religious, and national identities had much in common with the broader Asian experience.

NEW CHINA, NEW TIBET, AND A NEW ERA FOR THE KHACHE

A quick succession of events unfolded in the spring of 1951 that would establish Tibet's political trajectory for the next decade and beyond. The Indian, British, and U.S. governments in the early months of 1951, after years of vague promises of support, signaled that they would not be willing to defend Tibet against a Chinese invasion or even provide a safe haven for the Dalai Lama's government. Tibetan government officials, seeing little or no alternative, met with officials from the Chinese government on May 23, 1951, and signed the 17-Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet. The agreement affirmed Chinese sovereignty over Tibet, although it stated it would "not alter the existing political system in Tibet." Ending months of speculation about his plans, the Dalai Lama returned to Lhasa from the Indian border town of Kalimpong, arriving in the Tibetan capital on August 17, 1951. Finally, on September 9, the *People's Daily* reported that with "the warm Tibetan sun" shining down on the spectacle, "Tibetan crowds flowed into the main avenues, sitting on the walls surrounding the city's many densely wooded

lin-ka (parks) dressed in their best Tibetan attire” to greet with requisite enthusiasm the several-thousand-strong vanguard of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).

The People’s Republic of China, like the Nationalists before them, insisted that Tibet was historically an integral and unalienable part of China, but they often emphasized Tibet’s Asian and Himalayan positioning. In a *People’s Daily* article published on September 7, 1949, just weeks prior to the formal founding of the PRC, the government laid out what would become one of several core rationales for China’s liberation of Tibet: “That British-American Imperialist efforts to invade Tibet is unmistakable. . . . British Imperialists through the Indian Nehru government, gained control of the protectorates (Ch. *tubang*) of Sikkim and Bhutan positioned between Tibet and India as a means by which to threaten the Tibetan regional authorities into taking one more step towards to submitting to Western governments.”⁸ The inclusion of Sikkim and Bhutan in its justification for liberating Tibet highlights China’s sensitivity to Tibet’s Himalayan standing while disingenuously sidestepping the Chinese government’s own tenuous position on the Tibetan plateau.

It was not simply that the PRC refused to acknowledge that the Tibetan government had functioned entirely independently of the Chinese government since 1912. It was also the fact that, even as China consolidated its rule over Tibet, the traditional ties the Dalai Lama’s government had with Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim remained in place. More startling is the equally telling fact that the Himalayan states, all with prior ties to Qing China, had resolutely refused to officially recognize the new Chinese Communist government.

The PRC’s swift occupation of Tibet caused speculation across the Himalayan region over China’s ultimate intentions. This concern included how China might alter the status, rights, and position of Nepalese, Bhutanese, and Kashmiri, as well as the Khatsara, Koko, and Khache. For the Tibetan Muslims, the 1950s marked an era of opportunity as well as unaccustomed scrutiny by both Tibetans and Chinese. The Khache quickly sought to indicate their loyalty, with one Wapaling Khache explaining to a Chinese official, “We Hui-Hui support (Ch. *qingxiang*) the motherland. We often were at the receiving end of the [Tibetan] government’s pro-English group’s wrath. At this old age, what do I have to be afraid of? Before I would not dare do many things, now that we have freedom and equality, what am I to be afraid of?”⁹ Although the political discourse certainly changed with the establishment of the PRC, Chinese characterization of Lhasa in the public media remained remarkably similar to that presented by the Nationalist officials during the previous decade. In newspapers, magazines, and radio broadcasts, all Muslims were monolithically labeled “Hui.” The repeated articulation of Muslims as Hui, Tibetans as Zang, and Chinese as Han was a formula used to demonstrate the government’s support of ethnic diversity but also to emphasize Tibet’s similarity to China. Deliberately fastidious in their efforts to appear ethnically neutral, Chinese officials pursued ethnic parity at all levels of the government

(even though the Han and Hui represented a tiny proportion of Tibet's population). To take one example, the Patriotic Cultural Youth League membership in 1955 was reportedly composed of 100 Tibetans, 100 Chinese, 80 Wapaling Khaches, and 20 Barkor Khaches.¹⁰

Portraying the Khache in this manner proved useful to the Chinese in multiple ways. The Chinese could avoid the appearance of exclusively promoting the interests of the Han if their policies and public works also included the Hui. The Chinese Communists, however, differed from the Nationalists in one critical way. In unofficial writings by early Chinese officials sent into Lhasa, following the initial vanguard, one encounters both an understanding of and a concern with the divisions within and among the various Muslim communities—particularly the differences between the Barkor and Wapaling Khache communities. The recognition of the Barkor Khache as aligned with India proved to be an early concern for many Chinese officials. It was also of concern that the Barkor Khache remained more strongly allied with the Tibetan government than did their Wapaling Khache neighbors. Yet both groups remained monolithically Hui in the writings of the period.

Similar to the Nationalists' dispatching of the Lhasa-born Liu Manqing in 1927 to serve as an early envoy for the government, Beijing identified and included cadres whose knowledge of Muslim affairs would shape China's early efforts to realign Tibetan attitudes with those of Central China. Foremost among these figures was the Beijing native Xue Wenbo. As the historian Włodzimierz Cieciora has neatly presented, Xue was a Hui scholar active in Republican intellectual circles during the 1930s who had "advocated pan-Muslim nationalism, defining *Huizu* as encompassing all the Muslims in the world, not only in China."¹¹ A pro-Muslim activist with a global perspective, Xue had been hand-picked to serve on a five-member Nationalist Chinese Muslim delegation to the Near East in the 1930s.¹² With a strong record of assisting the Communist government in Qinghai and Gansu, Xue possessed the skills and political background to make him a natural fit to join the Tibet Working Research Team attached to the PLA forces departing for Lhasa in 1951.¹³ His presence in Lhasa, beginning in early December, denotes a sophisticated awareness by the Chinese central government of Lhasa society.

In his memoirs Xue indicates his mandate was vague but stemmed from the leadership's concern that the two Khache communities remained divided in some ways. Realizing the essential role they played in Lhasa, Xue "was ordered by [his] superiors to unify them into a single group."¹⁴ The Barkor Khaches' stature in Lhasa was not lost on Xue. Their standing as traders "was second only to the Nepalese, and only after them do the Han and Hui appear."¹⁵ It was Chinese officials, including Xue, who demonstrated how difficult it was for outsiders to comprehend the subtle differences within the Lhasa Muslim community.

Even though he had traveled throughout the Muslim world and had a deep personal and intellectual familiarity with divisions among the Chinese Hui,

Xue indicated upon his arrival that he had difficulty not only differentiating the Barkor from the Wapaling Khache but also distinguishing both groups from the Tibetans. Eventually he came to be able to tell the Barkor and Wapaling apart by their sartorial preferences, noting that “Barkor (Ch. *Ke-shi-mi-er*) prefer wearing a red and black hat that is taller and longer while the Wapaling (Ch. *Hui*) prefer a smaller and flatter black and white hat.”¹⁶ In spite of his awareness of internal differences, journal entries from his time in Lhasa tend to characterize the Khache on the whole as more ideologically aligned with China than with the Tibetans. Differing in tone from the *People’s Daily* account above, Xue’s journal recounts that “when the People’s Liberation Army arrived in Lhasa, the Lhasa Tibetans, as a result of the pro-British propaganda, were not terribly welcoming (Ch. *qinre*), but the long-oppressed Hui already believed themselves to be closer to the motherland, and were willing to come out and support us in our efforts.”¹⁷ Like many Chinese tasked to work in Tibet in the early years of the PRC, Xue tackled his duties with considerable enthusiasm and blamed the differences within the Muslim community on the lack of progressive influences in the traditional Tibetan society. Xue focused on recruiting the Khache as essential interlocutors and supporters of government-desired reforms in Lhasa, a task that gained considerably more urgency in the face of inflation and the unanticipated shortfall of supplies that occurred with the arrival of the Chinese in the Tibetan capital.

Descriptions of Lhasa in the 1950s often highlight the rapid inflation that occurred immediately after the arrival of the Chinese.¹⁸ Less often emphasized is that the worst of this inflation was a short-lived result of the influx of Chinese soldiers and officials without a commensurate level of supplies being sent with them, creating a scarcity of goods.¹⁹ During the first six months, the price of grain quadrupled. However, Goldstein’s detailed study of the 1951–55 period argues that the extreme shortages and inflation were mostly transitory. Tibetan and Chinese officials resolved the acute grain shortage, caused by improper accounting and communications, within a year. The larger food-supply issues were partially dealt with by planting and harvesting barley and vegetables from reclaimed swampland outside of Lhasa. By and large, the worst of the food shortages had been rectified by the summer of 1952.²⁰

As inflation became a fact of life during the early months of Chinese rule, the dramatic influx of silver dollars made a deep impression on many Tibetans. The noted Tibetan historian Dawa Norbu recalled a saying popular in Lhasa at the time, “The Chinese Communist Party is like a kind parent / To whom we owe a great debt of gratitude / They give us silver dollars like showers of rain” (Tib. *rgya gung khran drin chen pha ma red dngul da yangs char pa babs babs red*).²¹ The Chinese government paid for all goods in silver dollars, and the soldiers and government officials who were posted to Lhasa drew their salaries in silver dollars. As most of the Chinese had their daily needs met by eating and living in government quarters, they had considerable disposable income to spend on items

not available in China proper, and at a much cheaper price.²² As a result of the 17-Point Agreement signed in 1951, traders were still permitted to import goods from India that were scarce, extremely expensive, or even banned in other parts of China. In addition, luxury goods remained tax-free (or were taxed at a greatly reduced rate) as compared with other inland Chinese cities.²³ These conflicting forces—inflation and monetary policy—simultaneously created both a scarcity of basic foodstuffs and a market for luxury goods inconceivable in China.

In the first months following his arrival in late 1951, Xue Wenbo remarked on the difference between the goods available in Lhasa and the markets in Qinghai. In his memoirs he noted that during his six-month stay in Lhasa, “life was quite good. We had access to American powdered milk and ornately wrapped candies, and I was even able to buy an Omega brand watch.”²⁴ Several years later, in 1956, the Xinhua News Agency photographer Chen Zonglie recalled his surprise, soon after being posted to Lhasa, at being escorted to the Barkor and seeing the stalls “fully stocked with goods that one almost never saw in interior China such as brand-name Swiss watches, French perfume, Italian accordions, German cameras, American Kodak film, . . . Indian silk, spices, condensed milk and desserts, as well as Nepalese Buddhist figurines and ceremonial instruments, etc.”²⁵

With the large number of Chinese officials and soldiers in Tibet, demand swiftly outstripped supply. In interviews years later, Tibetan Muslim caravaners boasted of selling off their complete inventory within days of arriving in Lhasa. Realizing the remunerative potential, the Barkor Tibetan Muslim traders quickly abandoned the importation of textiles, cigarettes, and kerosene and branched out into high-value, low-bulk luxury items such as European pens, watches, and even batteries. The scale and scope of goods being imported from India into Tibet, even as the availability of dry goods and the wool trade shrank, caused profits to soar for most traders. A British Embassy official traveling in northwestern and central China shared a train compartment with a Chinese Air Force major who was returning from an assignment in Lhasa:

He was wearing a new Rolex watch and explained that he had bought it in Lhasa where watches and pens are tax-free. He had therefore paid only ¥130 instead of ¥480 in Beijing. In Lhasa there are apparently large numbers of Omega, Rolex, Longines and even American watches together with a plentiful supply of Parker ‘51 pens, all imported from India. Members of the Chinese forces are allowed to buy one watch and one pen each.²⁶

Even as late as 1958, an Indian trade agent, K. C. Johorey, who was posted at the Indian-Tibetan border town of Yatung (Tib. *Dromo*; Ch. *Yadong*), reported that there remained “a heavy demand for radios, cameras and watches as the Chinese were buying these in the hundreds and thousands.”²⁷

The plethora of luxury goods was in stark contrast to the dearth of daily necessities. It was during this period that the Chinese government, having few

local options, had to ship in needed supplies such as medicines, construction materials, and even rice from outside Tibet. This allowed the Khaches, as well as Tibetan and Nepalese traders, to make unprecedented profits.²⁸ These profits meant many more Barkor Khaches could, and did, bear the expense of sending their children to study in the Indian hill stations of Kalimpong and Darjeeling, or even Delhi. It was against this backdrop of a significantly altered political situation, as well as acute shortages of food, fuel, and housing, that the Barkor Khaches found their economic circumstances in the 1950s far exceeding what they had experienced in the 1930s and 1940s.

With profits rising and business good in 1956, as many as forty-one Tibetan Muslims were able to afford the high cost associated with going on pilgrimage to Mecca—more than double the number who went ten years earlier.²⁹ These Khaches did not travel with the official Chinese Islamic Association delegation (and thus do not appear in national statistics). They traveled by their own means via India, demonstrating a rarely remarked autonomy from the PRC's control over all religious associations and international travel.³⁰ China had attempted to send a group of Chinese Muslims on the hajj via Pakistan as early as 1952, only to be denied entry by Saudi Arabia with whom the People's Republic of China did not have diplomatic relations. Indian officials in Lhasa reported concern in 1956 among the Wapaling Khache over whether Saudi Arabia would accept Chinese passports, for it created "considerable anxiety as to whether they would be granted entry." They were told, however, by Chinese officials that "by the kindness of Chairman Mao, the Muslims had been able to proceed to Mekka."³¹ More likely, the Tibetan Muslims simply joined Indian Muslims traveling from Bombay. Relatively large numbers of Khaches took the hajj during the 1950s. As Yusuf Naik indicated, many Barkor Khaches went several times, his father, for example, in 1953 and 1958.³²

The ongoing contact with India and the Middle East, prevalent among the Barkor Khache, raised concerns among Chinese officials regarding that community's loyalty. Xue Wenbo was delighted that both the Barkor and the Wapaling Khache participated in the first May Day celebrations in Lhasa, excitedly describing them "carrying the national flag, enthusiastically shouting slogans." The Khaches' patriotism, however, remained an open question for many of the newly arrived Chinese authorities.³³

If the Barkor Khaches were prospering economically through their trade and other commercial ventures, the Wapaling Khaches profited as linguistic, cultural, and political brokers between the Chinese and Tibetans. From the perspective of the Chinese, the Wapaling Khaches were crucial interlocutors. This affinity between these two groups did not always sit well with the Tibetans. Some Tibetans even suggested that the Wapaling Khaches viewed the liberation of Tibet as a personal windfall, well deserved for their having suffered under the pro-British Tibetan government.

The Wapaling Khaches' rapport with Chinese officials stemmed from years of cultural and linguistic linkages, yet, as discussed in chapter 3, there exists little evidence that such connections caused the Wapaling Khaches to perceive themselves as "Chinese" or even "Hui." Rather, the local Wapaling Khaches, even in 1952, tended to describe themselves as common Tibetans (Ch. *Xizang de baixing*).³⁴ However, the pro-Chinese stance of the Wapaling Khaches gradually came to annoy many local Tibetans. This vexation most likely stemmed from the seeming favoritism shown them by the Chinese.³⁵ A former Tibetan government official, Tubten Khétsun, with a bitterness undiminished by the intervening decades, recalled that the Wapaling Khaches "immediately after the invasion welcomed and cooperated with [the Chinese Communists] like a baby embracing its mother" (Tib. *btsan 'dzul byas ma thag a ma yin shag dang nu ma 'thung shag*).³⁶ It was certainly not just the Wapaling Khaches who benefited from the arrival of the Chinese. As Dawa Norbu has noted, it was during the 1950s that "for about seven years the Chinese invaders literally [gave] away *dayin* (silver dollars). Every man has his price, and I do not think that there was any Tibetan heroic enough to refuse."³⁷ But the perception of the Wapaling Khache both benefiting from the Chinese and assisting them is likely accurate.

With a dearth of Tibetan-Chinese translators available in Lhasa, the Wapaling Khaches emerged as critical intermediaries for Chinese officials and soldiers. They were in high demand as a result of the political and economic forces in play, and these forces most likely proved too enticing to resist.³⁸ Like the Barkor Khache who profited from the new trade in luxury goods being purchased by the newly arrived Chinese officials and soldiers, the Wapaling Khache appear to have displayed little disquiet over any moral, political, or ethnic dilemmas that were presented by aligning themselves with the new Chinese presence in Lhasa.

The Wapaling Khaches' linguistic abilities also led the Chinese Communist officials to replicate early Nationalist policy by introducing state-approved curricula and engaging the Wapaling Khaches as natural partners in that venture. In 1952, two elementary schools were established, one was Tibetan and the other was Chinese. In the Chinese school, Wapaling Khaches held key positions and ran the school with the Wapaling *ahong* (a Chinese term for "imam") serving as the principal. A previous Wapaling Khache Council leader, Wang Chunshen, was appointed assistant principal. As had occurred in the 1930s and 1940s when the mosque became the Chinese school, the classes held on the grounds of the Grand Mosque offered instruction in Chinese, Tibetan, and Arabic.³⁹ While it may seem that an Islamic presence in Lhasa's first public schools under Communist rule would be an issue, in the near term, like the earlier efforts by the Nationalists, the Chinese officials had few options for instructors fluent in Tibetan and Chinese or for appropriate alternative school sites.

The more immediate problem appeared to be how to classify the Khache. Chinese officials and cadres admitted they were undeniably Tibetan, as demonstrated by their dress, language, and social traits, but they consistently referred to the Khache as Hui. The Communist government saw being Muslim as sufficient to designate them as Hui. The Chinese approached the question through the lens of whether or not Tibetans were Chinese citizens, reasoning that if both the Wapaling and the Barkor Khache had been treated as Tibetan and Tibet was now part of China, then the Khache were Chinese citizens.⁴⁰

The primacy of Tibet as Chinese, while adequate to resolve questions of citizenship, was less effective in dealing with the question of understanding the Khache ethnically as either Hui or Tibetan. The default interpretation of treating them as Hui hints at the larger problem the Chinese had with individuals of mixed parentage and heritage or marriages between Tibetans and foreign nationals, as existed with the Nepalese and Ladakhi. Such questions were not simply academic, given that for several years the Tibeto-Nepalese Treaty of 1856 granting the Khatsara Nepalese citizenship had not been officially abrogated.⁴¹ As groups like the Ladakhi, Nepalese, Indians, and other Himalayan peoples continued to traverse the Tibetan borders, as they had prior to Chinese control, the difference between Tibet's continued relationship with its neighbors, on the one hand, and the Dalai Lama's acknowledgment of Chinese rule, on the other, became an increasingly awkward issue for the Chinese in both predictable and unpredictable ways.

LOST CITIZENS OF THE HIMALAYAS

What is often forgotten in much of Chinese scholarship on Tibet is that regardless of whether one accepts China's claim that Tibet has been part of China since the Yuan dynasty is the fact that Tibet remained far more embedded in Himalayan and Central Asian politics than the politics of central China. Tibet's *de facto* independence after the fall of the Qing in 1911 only amplified Tibet's Himalayan ties, allowing Tibet to reestablish itself as a political, religious, and commercial center among its Himalayan neighbors.

Although Nepal occasionally sent missions to the Qing court and Qing documents described the relations of Bhutan, Nepal, and Sikkim with China as tributary states (Ch. *jingong*), each of these states had far closer ties with Tibet than with China.⁴² Complicating the picture is the fact that these same Himalayan states, in addition to Kashmir and other lesser Himalayan states, had all experienced varying degrees of British control, making them essentially British protectorates. At one extreme, in Sikkim, the British gained "direct and exclusive control over internal administration and foreign relations."⁴³ At the other extreme, in Nepal, Nepalese officials retained internal autonomy during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, although Britain often dictated the

country's foreign policy.⁴⁴ Bhutan evolved from a quasi-protectorate in the late nineteenth century to being forced to cede much of its external affairs to Britain by the early twentieth century.

Regardless of this British influence, it was throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century that all three Himalayan states continued to dispatch permanent and semipermanent representatives to Lhasa. Annual tribute payments were exchanged between Tibet and its neighbors, demonstrating the continuing relationship between them. The resilience of these relationships, in light of the tumultuous events in Asia during the 1930s and 1940s, is impressive. Although it is true that by the postwar 1940s, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim were paid little heed by India and China, for Tibet they remained key nodes of external contact. Only with the People's Republic of China's decision to invade and declare Tibet part of sovereign China in 1951 did the position of the Himalayan states slowly demonstrate their relevance.

The 1950s were a time of careful Sino-Indian diplomacy, a diplomacy emerging out of these nations' shared struggle for independence and liberation from an imperialist past. As the Cold War heated up, both China and India sought to cooperate in the pursuit of a new Asian era, unfettered by the former colonial or new Cold War powers. Nehru had deftly negotiated India's independence from British rule and became the first prime minister of independent India in 1947. Similarly, Mao cast the victory of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949 as one of China having finally "stood up" after a century of humiliation.

Although both Nehru and Mao certainly aspired to become dominant Asian leaders and wield the informal prestige that would spring from such a role, both intuitively grasped the strategic benefits of jointly forging postcolonial solidarity in Asia. On numerous occasions following Indian independence, Nehru advocated on China's behalf, including consistent support of the PRC's claim to China's seat in the United Nations. China's invasion of Tibet did not alter his stance. Staunchly pro-Tibet, Nehru hewed to a distinctly pragmatic line, realizing that China's leaders seemed intent on reclaiming Tibet and that most of the other world powers were determined not to get involved. Nehru remarked, "I think it may be taken for granted that China will take possession, in a political sense at least, of the whole of Tibet. There is no likelihood whatever of Tibet being able to resist this or stop it. It is equally unlikely that any foreign power can prevent it. We cannot do so."⁴⁵

After the arrival of Chinese troops in Tibet, and even after it was clear Nehru would not intervene, Tibet's neighbors did not immediately relinquish their extraterritorial ties with Tibet. Bhutan, for example, continued to post a permanent representative to Lhasa through 1960, even as it refused formal diplomatic ties with Beijing.⁴⁶ China's permissiveness towards Tibet's relations with its neighbors neatly correlates with the central government's initial commitment to Tibetan autonomy. Similarly, China, initially at least, allowed the Tibeto-Nepalese Treaty of 1856 to remain in force. This included allowing Tibet, with China's acquiescence,

to continue making its annual 1856 treaty payments of 10,000 rupees to Nepal.⁴⁷ The government's early forbearance stemmed largely from its categorization of the Tibetan government's actions as ceremonial rather than political in nature. However, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim, as well as the Dalai Lama and his Tibetan government, quickly demonstrated that they saw them as more tangible.

A year after Tibet and China signed the 17-Point Agreement, China could not have been happy to see Indian press reports of a letter from the Dalai Lama to the Nepalese representative in Lhasa (N. *vikil*) stating, "[I have] every hope that there will be no hindrance to continuing the age-old relations between my Government and yours. I pray to God that our relations may become stronger than ever."⁴⁸ A year later, in 1953, China finally informed the Lhasa government that it should cease the annual tribute payments to Nepal as stipulated in the 1856 treaty. But that seems not to have put the matter to rest, as two years later Nepalese prime minister M. P. Koirala asserted that "Nepal would approach the Dalai Lama and not Beijing, for Nepal even now acknowledged the Dalai Lama as the sovereign of Tibet."⁴⁹ As the political scientist Leo Rose correctly pointed out, Nepal's stance "by implication, at least, seem[s] to question China's claim to sovereignty in Tibet."⁵⁰

It is odd that despite China telling the Tibetan government to cease its relations with Nepal, neither the Tibetan nor the Chinese government notified Nepal of the intention to abrogate the treaty, which left Nepalese officials simply waiting for the tribute mission to arrive in 1954. This expectation is somewhat more understandable given that China and Nepal had yet to establish formal diplomatic ties. Nepal's surprise at this measure is palpable when the Nepalese prime minister somewhat plaintively conceded in 1954 that the "tribute-bearing emissary of the Dalai Lama does not seem to have left Lhasa."⁵¹ The following month when the Nepalese representative in Lhasa was again instructed by his government to query the Dalai Lama about the matter, he was told "to refer all questions about Nepalese-Tibetan relations to the Chinese Government."⁵² China's swift, decisive, yet unexplained actions alerted the Himalayan states to the intentions of the Chinese Communists in ways that troubled many across the Asian subcontinent.

Headlines such as "Reds Next Move Near India's Border" were common in newspapers, in government debates, and on street corners across the region in the early 1950s. Such concerns, when read in the context of global Cold War anxiety, appear unremarkable. Given that China seldom mentioned any of the Himalayan states, let alone made provocative statements about them, the number of entirely fabricated reports that circulated in the Indian and Western press was extraordinary.⁵³

Many newspaper articles, politicians' speeches, and diplomatic reports citing a wide variety of sources (including Mao's own writings) began to assert that Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan, like Tibet, had been part of China and would soon be reclaimed in a similar manner.⁵⁴ A prominent promoter of such notions was George Patterson, a Scottish medical missionary who had lived in the Kham

region of eastern Tibet for several years in the late 1940s. Forced to flee the region in 1949, he took up residence in the hill towns of Kalimpong and Darjeeling, earning a living writing stories describing China's ill treatment of Tibetans. In his first book, *God's Fools*, he claimed that China's occupation of Tibet was part of a larger plan to "liberate" all of Asia, asserting that "within one year Tibet would be liberated, within three years Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan would be liberated and in five years India would be liberated."⁵⁵ Preying on Cold War anxiety, he promoted the phrase "Tibet's Five Fingers" to describe the designs China had on Kashmir, Nepal, Sikkim, and the North East Frontier Agency of Assam as natural targets stemming from their invasion of Tibet.

Certainly as Mao Zedong has gone on record as saying that Nepal must return to China as part of her former territories annexed by the imperialists and he has also said that Nepal and China must work together to liberate their "oppressed brothers in India." But in China's long-term plan it is Sikkim, the middle finger, the NEFA, the thumb, which will play the key pressure parts in China's larger ambitions in these areas.⁵⁶

There was one small problem with Patterson's assertions. They were entirely fabricated. No Chinese documents, and in particular none of Mao's writings, ever made any claim for territorial expansion into the Himalayan states. There was certainly nothing approaching the very clear claims the Chinese Communists had indicated for Tibet.⁵⁷

DR. SINGH AND REDEFINING HIMALAYAN ASIA

The active imagination of Patterson and others regarding China's interest in the Himalayan front range, however, should not suggest that the events in Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim were not of interest or did not affect Tibet and China more broadly. The extraordinary experiences of Dr. K. I. (Kunwar Inderjit) Singh reflect how little attention is given to the Himalayan context in which these events occurred.⁵⁸ Singh was a Nepalese politician who in the course of five years would be called a revolutionary, a populist, a communist, and a rebel, and yet he was a man who also gained the title of prime minister of Nepal for four months in 1957. His experience demonstrates the risk of viewing this period purely through a Cold War lens, a lens that focuses solely on nationalist or ideological themes to the exclusion of the still-present traditional interstate ties.

Raised in western Nepal, Singh led a peripatetic life that included growing up in rural western Nepal, fighting for (and being dishonorably discharged from) the Indian National Army (INA), fleeing Burma on the eve of the Japanese invasion just prior to his becoming a practitioner of homeopathy back in Nepal. An early member of the Nepali Congress Party in western Nepal, Singh promoted a reformist agenda that pushed rural relief to the forefront of Nepal's political

consciousness. Singh's grassroots organizational skills and his ability to speak in blunt and coarse language that resonated with Nepal's broad underclass rocketed him to political prominence. The same qualities quickly attracted the attention of the government, which, threatened by his success, accused him of banditry and other crimes against the regime.

In the course of six months in late 1951, Singh was arrested, imprisoned, and escaped; he was ultimately rearrested and transferred to Kathmandu, where in January 1952 he awaited trial. A result of the ruling Rana family's oligarchic excesses, Nepal in this period was already experiencing a constitutional crisis. Singh was a popular leader, and his presence in the capital prompted sympathetic members of the paramilitary police to carry out a coup d'état.

Late on January 21, Singh's supporters released and immediately declared Singh the leader of a new parallel government. In a poorly coordinated set of maneuvers, the rebels raced to seize key governmental offices, to gain control over the nation's communications centers, and to round up top ministers, all in a bid to spur the reform-minded King Tribhuvan to call for an all-party representative government.⁵⁹ Instead, the state army, tipped off in advance, whisked the leading government officials to safe havens, quickly recaptured many of the key state buildings, and effectively forestalled the prospect of negotiations with the king. Less than twelve hours after it had begun, the coup had failed.

Realizing their fate, Singh and a small group of his closest associates, in the dead of winter, fled Kathmandu and headed north towards Tibet.⁶⁰ Exactly why Singh chose to flee to Tibet remains an enigma. His base of support lay in western Nepal near the southern Indian border. Politically, he had never allied himself with any communist movements or demonstrated strong interest in Chinese Communism. The decision to flee to Tibet must have been relatively spontaneous. Given the almost certain ruthless reception he would face upon capture, Tibet's proximity (roughly a hundred miles from Kathmandu) and misplaced optimism that the Chinese would support any anti-establishment movement likely seemed a better option.⁶¹

The sheer audacity of the escape combined with Singh's larger-than-life personality fueled wide-ranging rumors that soon filled the front pages of newspapers across the Himalayan front range to Delhi and beyond. By February, the Nepalese government, clinging to power and seeking to use the threat of extremist and radical political parties to gain public support for their government, insinuated that "the Chinese Communists with the help of the rebel leader Dr. K. I. Singh would take advantage of this [lack of peace] and enlarge their field of activity."⁶² Weeks turned into months with no clear intelligence about what had happened to Singh, and the rumors grew. In March, reports speculated that Singh, with roughly "50 followers, fully armed, and a large amount of cash looted from the Nepalese treasury," had used the funds to make "substantial payment to local Tibetan officials for protection and safe passage to Lhasa."⁶³

By April 1952, the stories began to take a slightly different tack. Some asserted that Singh had been invited to Beijing, his men had enlisted in the People's Liberation Army, and all were involved in a plan for Singh "to take a leading part in the 'liberation' of Nepal."⁶⁴ Shortly thereafter, it was suggested that Singh and his followers had been captured near Shigatse, with the Nepalese trade agent stationed there assisting in "negotiations between the Tibetan and Nepal Governments."⁶⁵ By July, a newspaper article highlighting disturbances in western Nepal speculated that the leader must be "a follower of K. I. Singh," since the "trouble-makers" were "either Communist-led groups or the rightist Rana elements or a combination of both."⁶⁶ Nor were these rumors simply gossip published by the papers to sell more copy. When Nepalese general Bijaya briefed British officials in May, he informed them that there was "no doubt that K. I. Singh had turned completely Communist . . . [and] that he was gathering some of his followers and [there was] a risk that he might stage an armed uprising in Nepal."⁶⁷ With the benefit of hindsight, we now know that the accusations claiming Singh and his men had joined the Chinese army or had participated in plans to "liberate" Nepal or that Singh had become "completely Communist" were entirely untrue. In some ways, the true story of Singh's time in China is equally interesting if not quite as politically expedient for those attempting to use his flight to Tibet for their own political ends.

In an odd twist of fate, on January 21, 1952, at the very moment that Singh and his men, desperate to escape pursuing Nepalese troops, were racing north to Tibet after their failed coup, Peter Aufschnaiter, grateful to have escaped from Communist-controlled Tibet into Nepal, was headed south along the same road. Aufschnaiter, the sardonic friend of Heinrich Harrer, whose book *Seven Years in Tibet* would make them both household names later that year, had fled Lhasa ahead of the arrival of the People's Liberation Army. In Aufschnaiter's telling, "K. I. Singh had escaped northwards along the road I was traveling down. His group crossed the river at Shabru, throwing the middle section of the bridge into the water to hinder pursuers, and then crossed over the [Rasua Garhi] Pass from Chilime to Chang in Tibet continuing to Kyirong."⁶⁸ Forgoing the main road for the less patrolled mountain paths, Singh eluded efforts by Nepalese troops to block his progress at Rasua Garhi pass (elev. 16,500 ft.).⁶⁹ His band of brothers fared badly. Without proper clothing or supplies, several of the nearly forty men who began the journey died in the crossing. On January 31, 1952, Singh and his remaining followers emerged in Tibet frostbitten and famished.⁷⁰ Singh later indicated that they did not reach Shigatse until March 20, 1952, where they remained for four months, before moving on to Lhasa in June.⁷¹

From all accounts, the Chinese were as surprised as the rest of the world about Singh's arrival in Tibet. It should be remembered that the first Chinese officials and soldiers of any significant number had just arrived in Lhasa months earlier, in September 1951, followed by the main forces in December. The first months

of their occupation had not gone smoothly, as they grappled with rampant inflation, dwindling food supplies, and with having only a tenuous political grip on the country, outside of Lhasa and Shigatse. Although desperate to improve their image, the Chinese seemed at a loss as to what to do about Singh and his men, particularly as the Nepalese government, still treating the Tibetan government as an autonomous entity, communicated only with Tibetan officials in their effort to locate and repatriate Singh.⁷² Given that the Nepalese and Chinese governments would not establish diplomatic ties for another four years (1956), the Nepalese actions were not completely irrational. Desperate to get control of the situation, Chinese officials went to great pains to have Singh and his men apprehended, even procuring a photo of Singh and providing it to the local Tibetan government. Given the political ambiguities of this situation, it is intriguing that the Chinese did not simply order Singh and his men back to Nepal. They chose instead to order the local Tibetan officials to hand him over to them so that he could be transferred “on to China.”⁷³

That Singh did not arrive in Lhasa until midsummer, five months after his arrival in Tibet, is indicative of the limits of Chinese control in those early months. As late as June, the Nepalese representative in Lhasa continued to effectively canvas “senior [Tibetan] officials to secure the handing over of K.I. Singh to Nepal.”⁷⁴ Only in early August, half a year after fleeing Kathmandu, did Singh and his nearly forty followers leave Lhasa for the southwestern China city of Chengdu, which traditionally served as the administrative hub for Tibetan-related activities.⁷⁵ While Singh and his men were likely to have welcomed the Chinese intervention on their behalf, the questions of jurisdiction still being sorted out between the Tibetans and the recently arrived Chinese suggest the limited reach of the Chinese authority, or as one British official speculated, it could have simply represented “the procrastination of Tibetan officials.”⁷⁶

Singh appeared delighted to be in China. According to Chinese accounts, he repeatedly compared his journey from Kathmandu to China as his own personal “Long March,” asking on his arrival to be taken to Beijing to meet with Mao Zedong. This request would be politely deflected and never fulfilled during his nearly four-year sojourn in China. After arriving in Chengdu, he and his men were provided with housing, language instruction, and the occasional outing. It was not until the following May 1953 that Chinese officials invited Singh to Beijing; the forty men who had come with him remained in Chengdu.⁷⁷ In Beijing he led the life of an honored visiting guest, living in a government guest house and meeting with a string of minor foreign office and friendship association officials.⁷⁸ From his treatment, it is clear that the Chinese perceived Singh more as a political fugitive for whom they had generously provided asylum than as a revolutionary leader whose presence could serve a domestic or international purpose.

The Chinese rarely, if ever, publicized his arrival or used him in politically motivated ways. No articles appeared touting his support of China, nor was his

presence used to demonstrate the weakness of “lackeys of western imperialism.” There also does not seem to be any evidence that they contemplated at any point benefiting from his presence in fomenting Communist activity in Nepal.⁷⁹ Several years later, in one of his rare public comments about his time in China, Singh simply stated, “The Communist countries have their own rules to regulate the movement of foreign visitors and political refugees. I was governed by those rules.”⁸⁰ Even after Singh returned to Nepal to become prime minister for a brief period in 1957, the Chinese state media never alluded to his time in China, even though numerous reports of his term as prime minister appeared in Chinese newspapers.⁸¹ While Singh’s motives for his actions remained opaque, it seems likely the Chinese were primarily intent on keeping him from further destabilizing Nepal and, potentially, Tibet.

China’s strategy to control the international framing of Singh’s visit appears to have had some merit. Although all evidence suggests that China had given diplomatic relations with Nepal little consideration prior to 1952, China could hardly ignore Nepal’s repeated efforts to maintain the terms of the 1856 Nepal-Tibet Treaty in which Tibet was considered an independent government. Nepal’s expectation of annual tributes and the prime minister’s reference in 1954 to the Dalai Lama as “the sovereign of Tibet” suggested that Nepal had no intention of accepting China’s presence in Tibet.⁸² Nor was China entirely sure of India’s stance in the matter. Nepal had long been under the mantle of India. Nehru repeatedly asserted that the “Himalayas are the guardians and sentinels of India and Nepal and their white-capped peaks welcome friends and are a warning to those of hostile intents,” going on to conclude that he considered “the fate of India and Nepal linked closely together.”⁸³

In early 1954, several disparate elements of China’s broader plan began to move toward a delicate alignment with India, Nepal, and Tibet. Only months after Singh crossed into Tibet, India and China finally concluded a Sino-Indian agreement, which was signed on April 29, 1954. The agreement included elements that satisfied both China and India. Foremost of these was that India explicitly recognized China’s sovereignty in Tibet and forfeited all former privileges that it held in Tibet. Despite considerable domestic opposition, Nehru had reason to be pleased with the outcome. The agreement’s preamble included, for the first time, his Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (Panchsheel), a blueprint he believed would usher in a period of peace and stability in Asia. The principles the agreement envisaged were (1) mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, (2) mutual nonaggression, (3) mutual noninterference in each other’s internal affairs, (4) equality and mutual benefit, and (5) peaceful coexistence.⁸⁴ Speaking before the Indian Parliament and clearly defensive over claims he had been soft on China, he said, “In my opinion, we have done no better thing than this since we became independent. . . . I think it is right for our country, for Asia, and for the world.”⁸⁵

In the weeks after the agreement, India and China both, independently, sought to resolve the respective ambiguities in their relationship with Nepal. In Beijing, Singh was summoned for a forty-minute meeting with Zhou, who proceeded to tell Singh that while China supported the Nepalese People's Revolution (Ch. *Nipoer Renmin Gemin*), Singh should understand that "China would never send even one soldier [to Nepal]."⁸⁶ It would seem that now, with the Sino-Indian Agreement signed, Singh's usefulness was coming to an end. Soon after Zhou met with Singh, Nehru summoned the Nepalese foreign minister to meet with him in New Delhi. In their meeting, and in equally explicit language, Nehru explained that the "old Treaty between Nepal and Tibet had no force or relevance today" and that "in effect Nepal should recognize the change in Tibet and not seek to exercise any of its previous rights."⁸⁷ Nepal's efforts to perpetuate its advantageous status with Tibet had come to an end, and neither China nor India was about to let Nepal's wishes get in the way of their larger plans.

Singh's significance in the larger picture became apparent several months later, in October 1954, when Nehru broached Singh's presence in China during his first state visit to Beijing:

There is a very small thing [I would like to raise]. . . . One man named K. I. Singh had created some trouble in Nepal some time ago, fled to Tibet. He was then reported to be in China. Later on, news came that he was being openly entertained. When persons who are traitors to their countries are thus openly feted then people naturally get apprehensive.⁸⁸

After assuring Nehru that China had no intention of asking Singh to engage "in any activity for overthrow of [the] Nepal Government," Zhou and Nehru continued to discuss China's need for diplomatic relations with Nepal. Zhou willingly conceded India's "special position in Nepal" and agreed that diplomatic representation for Nepal "could probably be dealt with by the Chinese Ambassador in Delhi, who was also accredited to Kathmandu."⁸⁹

As the discussion came to a close, Zhou Enlai raised the possibility of China being included in the Asian-African Conference championed by Nehru, which would later be known as the Bandung Conference. This was a moment that Nehru had been waiting for, for he emerged from the meeting with Zhou believing himself vindicated for engaging rather than resisting China's presence in Tibet. With Zhou's expressed interest in attending the Bandung Conference, Nehru had his faith in his Principles of Peaceful Coexistence confirmed.

Heavily criticized by his detractors at home for pursuing a policy of appeasement towards China, Nehru's efforts were seen by many of India's Asian neighbors as a masterful maneuver to break out of the dualistic Cold War geopolitics. Aware of the dangers presented by China's occupation of Tibet, Nehru clearly believed that the Sino-Indian Agreement and his successful state visit to Beijing validated his decision not to contest China's control of Tibet. It appeared to justify his policy,

dating to 1950, when he first asserted “that neither the U.K. nor the U.S.A., nor indeed any other Power, is particularly interested in Tibet or the future of that country. What they are interested in is embarrassing China. Our interest, on the other hand, is Tibet, and if we cannot serve that interest, we fail.”⁹⁰

This stark evaluation of the options available to India in this instance reflected an unabashed pragmatism, even as Nehru remained optimistic about avoiding the high stakes politics of the era. Much of his political philosophy is referred to obliquely, using a terminological shorthand that is rarely fully defined—“third way,” “non-aligned movement,” or *Panchsheel*. His philosophy did, however, capture the ethos of the period among the newly independent Asian and African nations. In the end, twenty-nine nations, including Nepal, India, and China, came together in Bandung, Indonesia, to lay the groundwork for a future free from their former colonial rulers and to explore ways to avoid the emerging divisions being imposed by the Cold War.

A tentative postcolonial expression of Afro-Asian unity, the Bandung Conference sought to forge a Third World alliance independent of the First World powers and to create a neutral space between Communist and non-Communist nations. Indonesian president Sukarno captured the boundless optimism of the conference in his opening speech when he set out the task of the twenty-nine African and Asian participant nations as nothing less than to “demonstrate to the minority of the world which lives on the other continents that we, the majority, are for peace, not for war.”⁹¹ Yet the mere fact that Nehru had convinced the attendant nations to allow the PRC to attend, which was still unrecognized by the United Nations, was a major step in demonstrating India’s commitment to facilitate China’s role in Asia. The conference fostered an Asia-centered discussion of issues facing the newly established nations—not one governed by colonial powers with permanent seats on the U.N. Security Council. Nehru hoped that the involvement of China with Asian initiatives would distance China from the Soviet Union while nurturing the possibility that India and China would emerge as the centers of Asian authority, free of external oversight. For its part, China believed that attending the conference would advance its efforts to manage relations among non-Western countries, to develop Islamic connections, and to promote the rights of Overseas Chinese even if they had not been citizens of China for generations.⁹²

A central dilemma for both India and China was that these communities of Indians and Chinese, many of whom had lived outside their homelands for generations, were perceived by their host countries as retaining enduring if ambiguous ties to their homelands. In many countries across Asia, the Indian and Chinese populations were seen as “a source of internal conflict and threat.”⁹³ The sense of threat was particularly present in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, where the Chinese made up a significant portion of the population, and Indonesia, where Overseas Chinese controlled considerable commercial and financial assets.

While all parties agreed that the implicit dual nationality of these communities posed a problem, the obvious solutions required multilateral agreements across Asia. Extremely sensitive to the accusation of fostering neo-imperialism, China and India sought to acknowledge their ethnocultural ties to these communities while advocating that they accept citizenship in their country of residence. Achieving such a solution would not only provide Asia's many newly founded states with a much-needed ethnic stability, but, as India and China recognized, if left unresolved such discontent would be redirected back at them and potentially prevent either or both from taking a much desired leadership role in Asia.

Nor was it simply demographic influence in elections or financial leverage that these newly formed nations most feared. In the case of Overseas Chinese, the question remained highly politicized. On the one hand, the Beijing government was concerned that many Overseas Chinese, particularly in India and Burma, might still be politically aligned with the Nationalist Chinese government which was still a prominent threat even if largely contained to the island of Taiwan. On the other hand, many countries in Southeast Asia worried that their Overseas Chinese populations might be susceptible to the Communist propaganda of mainland China and thus could serve as a fifth column within new nations. When this issue again emerged in talks in Beijing in 1954, Zhou Enlai stated quite categorically that China believes "there should be no dual nationality. An individual is either Chinese or a national of the country where he resides. It is a question left to us by history. But we would like to make it clear that it should be decided voluntarily and on the basis of parentage. If you remain Chinese then you cannot participate in the activities of the country where you reside."⁹⁴

With this question of citizenship still unanswered and with a deep desire to offer tangible evidence of a triumph fostered by the "Bandung spirit," China and Indonesia sought to bring resolution to the question of the citizenship of Indonesia's large Overseas Chinese population. In 1955 roughly 1.1 million Chinese still held dual nationality.⁹⁵ Since Indonesia's independence, and China's liberation, a central concern for both nations was the citizenship status of Overseas Chinese, essentially persons of Chinese descent, who at the end of Dutch rule in 1946 had passively acquired Indonesian nationality while still being considered ethnically alien by the Indonesians. Such a choice was not a patently obvious one at that time for most Overseas Chinese in Indonesia, given the strong anti-Chinese sentiments in many parts of the country. As the historian Philip Kuhn pointed out, "For an ethnic Chinese to renounce Chinese nationality and choose Indonesian offered scant protection."⁹⁶ Agreeing that the dilemma needed resolution, China and Indonesia met and emerged from the meeting with a bilateral accord on dual citizenship: those individuals who held dual citizenship would be allowed two years to choose citizenship in one or the other. In the context of the Bandung Conference, this protocol captured the resolve to address the undesirable and lingering vestige of colonialism in a peaceful and collective manner. Many took

the agreement as proof that these newly formed nations could broker their own agreements without the assistance of the former colonial and new Cold War powers. It also appeared to herald a broader resolution of the persistent concerns held by many Southeast Asian nations over the ambiguous status of Indian and Chinese communities outside of India and China.

The Bandung Conference also offered an interesting denouement for Singh. On the eve of the conference, the Nepalese king, Tribhuvan, died and his young son, Mahendra, ascended the throne. Hardly a reformist, King Mahendra, like many young Nepalese, still sought to guide Nepal away from India's overwhelming influence. He instructed his envoy to openly endorse the Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and he fully embraced the goals of the conference. Sensing the appropriate moment had arrived, Zhou Enlai approached the Nepalese delegate and conveyed that "Dr. K.I. Singh and his followers were anxious to return to Nepal, if the Nepalese Government assured them that they would not be prosecuted or otherwise victimized."⁹⁷ Despite the shift in political mood since his hasty departure, Singh had remained a popular figure in Nepal's political landscape. After the message was relayed to the king and Singh's return agreed to, the Nepalese government asked only for assurances that Singh and his men pledge to forsake any form of violence.

By September 1955, Singh and his followers arrived at the Tibet-Nepal border. Singh was escorted back into Nepal and ultimately pardoned by the king. He received a hero's welcome, as described at the beginning of this chapter. Even the international press took note. *Time* magazine labeled him the "Robin Hood of the Himalayas."⁹⁸ The question of Singh's political agenda and aspirations remained unknown, though many assumed that Singh would be sympathetic to Chinese values. After several weeks of reflection, Singh astonished the mainstream political establishment by announcing a political philosophy built on a pro-India and pro-monarchy platform underpinned by a vociferous denial of any Communist ties. Nehru remained unimpressed. After meeting Singh some weeks later in New Delhi, he described him, with his characteristic sharp wit, as "not a communist, just a freebooter."⁹⁹

With Singh's declaration of his pro-India beliefs, Nepal had become less anxious over China's territorial interests in Nepal. The following year, on September 20, 1956, Nepal and China signed the eight-year Agreement to Maintain the Friendly Relations between China and Nepal. The treaty not only officially abrogated the Nepal treaty of 1856 but also abolished all the privileges that Nepal and its citizens had previously enjoyed in Tibet.¹⁰⁰ The swiftness of this change is difficult to fully appreciate. On one level, the treaty simply brought the Nepal-China relationship to a modern diplomatic standard by replacing Nepal's representative with a consul. Yet there were other seemingly anodyne clauses in the treaty, such as the stipulation that all those "who travel across the border between the Tibet Region of China and Nepal, shall hold passports," that marked a rather sharp deviation from



Dr. K. I. Singh's triumphant welcome in Kathmandu, Nepal, on October 5, 1955, after having spent more than three years in the People's Republic of China. Copyright Bettmann / Getty Images.

the traditional ways in which Nepal, Tibet, and the other Himalayan states had interacted.¹⁰¹ Given the centrality of the concepts of citizenship, ethnicity, and nation at the Bandung Conference, it is striking how little attention was paid in the agreement to the complexities of Tibet's Himalayan relations and multiethnic population. In many ways the post-Bandung period generally, and the year 1956 specifically, signaled a high-water mark in China's attitude towards Tibet.

The Bandung Conference, Nehru's Five Principles, and K. I. Singh's escape to China all reflect a shared activism rooted in dissatisfaction with the political limitations of post-independence Asia. As Singh's experience epitomizes, his quixotic choice to seek refuge in China ultimately led back to his championing the traditional pillars of Nepalese politics: supporting the Nepalese monarchy and the Indian alliance. Similarly, the treaties signed between China, India, and Nepal were greeted with considerable enthusiasm precisely because they sought to usher in a new Asian order, one that transcended both Cold War divisions and the long-established status quo between Himalayan states and their neighbors. Yet in the rush to move forward, many elements of the past were forgotten. The Bandung Conference sought to facilitate, in different ways, an inter-Asian communication that would allow such changes to occur. The confident optimism of the early 1950s quickly succumbed to stiff conservatism, particularly with regard to the concepts of indigeneity and citizenship. The seemingly simple solutions defining citizenship through the philosophy advanced at Bandung or by treaties at the state-to-state level became difficult to enact on the ground given the highly situational and often ambiguous definitions of identity. No ideological optimism was able to paper over those challenges. The lingering Himalayan relations combined with the hardening notions of state boundaries and identity caused considerable consternation for the residents of central Tibet. The Himalayan manner in which the Khache, Khatsara, and Koko had thrived increasingly faded, leaving few options in the new postcolonial era.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END: 1956–1958

Much of China's early success in Tibet had been built on China's willingness to preserve, or in some cases simply to not prohibit, much of Tibetan culture, society, and, in some instances, government. In its depiction as a "forbidden kingdom," pristine and morally pure, pre-1951 Tibet has been cast as the epitome of an idealized version of premodern society. The few Western visitors in the 1940s often described screening movies to delighted Tibetan crowds as if seeing a film for the first time, suggesting that Tibet had remained untouched by such common "modern" experiences. There is, in fact, considerable evidence that the Tibetan elite were avid early adopters of motion pictures, and Tibetans in general were ardent consumers. Among the earliest of these enthusiasts was Tibetan commander-in-chief Tsarong Dasang Dadul who in 1936, after serving a sumptuous forty-course dinner to the British head of mission, Charles Bell, proceeded to give Bell a screening of an "8-millimeter cinema film which he had taken himself" on his "small electrically driven projector."¹⁰² Similarly, the Dalai Lama, from an early age, had been fascinated with movies ever since he discovered two hand-crank projectors belonging to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. The German visitor Heinrich Harrer and the English officer Frank Ludlow, serving the British Mission in Lhasa,

encouraged the popularity of film in private and public screenings.¹⁰³ Although such examples suggest that movies were a private affair of the elite, in fact, a Barkor Khache, Abdul Aziz, opened the first commercial cinema hall in Lhasa in the early 1930s, screening well-known Indian movies to considerable popular acclaim (and profit).¹⁰⁴

By the arrival of the Chinese in 1951, Lhasa residents had enjoyed the delights provided by cinema for several decades. The number, topic, and style of foreign films permitted in Central China in the 1950s, though perceived as a key avenue for the new regime to educate and indoctrinate its populace, was highly regulated. They tended to be limited to Chinese films or those from China's closest allies such as the Soviet Union. Chinese officials in Tibet decided quite early on to make exceptions there in an effort to woo favor among Tibetan residents for whom Indian films remained immensely popular. Within weeks of the Chinese arrival in Lhasa, Abdul Aziz's two younger brothers, Muhammad Asghar and Sirajuddin (commonly called the Tsakhur brothers), were, with little fuss, granted the necessary permits to show films at their private cinema.¹⁰⁵ Over the next few years, the Chinese authorities attempted to combine propaganda with entertainment, allowing the brothers to show Hindi films and even films borrowed from the Indian consulate, with the simple demand that all material be previewed for objectionable content by Chinese officials. As late as 1955, Chinese authorities still demanded that all Indian films be prescreened by them, though they had seemingly never censored or banned a single Indian film (leading many Tibetans to speculate the Chinese simply wanted a free screening of the Indian films).¹⁰⁶

In 1956, a subtle shift began to occur. Although the cinema remained as popular as ever and was still being allowed to show Chinese and Indian films, in late 1955, the Chinese central authorities procured three Indian films (*Do Bigha Zamin*, *Awara*, and *Toofan*), dubbed them into Chinese, and offered screenings to "select audiences." Clearly, the screenings were an effort by the Chinese authorities to tap into the undeniable success and popularity of Indian films. There appears to have also been some resentment among the Chinese over the fact that Tibetans found Chinese films lacking. According to an Indian consular report, many Tibetans had remarked "about the higher technical standards and aesthetic qualities of [Indian] films as compared with Chinese films, which are mostly of a propagandist nature."¹⁰⁷ Perhaps Chinese officials began to tire of these unfavorable comparisons, one being that, according to the Indian consul, despite several years of exposure to Chinese movies, it was those from India that remained "extremely popular among the Tibetans."¹⁰⁸

Business continued to be profitable and the political situation amenable enough for the Tsakhur brothers to decide to construct Lhasa's first public cinema hall on June 8, 1958. The Happy Light Movie Theater (Tib. *bde skyid od snang*) opened to great fanfare with a showing of *Jhanak Jhank Payal Baje* and included the screening

of several newsreels of the Dalai Lama's visit to China in 1954. The audience that night included important Tibetan officials, "a few Chinese officials," and the Indian consul general and his staff.¹⁰⁹ This grand opening, however, marked not the start of an era of superior cinematic experience but the beginning of increased Chinese censorship.

Soon after the grand opening, the Chinese informed the management that moving forward they would only be allowed to screen ten Indian movies per year. "The remaining pictures," they were advised, "should be either Chinese or Russian."¹¹⁰ By the end of 1958, Chinese officials reduced that number to "only six Indian pictures a year instead of ten, and they would have to get the films through them and not direct from India as being done by them at present." As the Indian consul general at the time remarked, "The Chinese notice that the India pictures are very popular and they draw full houses, while their own [Chinese] pictures fail to attract Tibetans."¹¹¹

Finally, in January 1959, the managing director of the theater was informed he would not be allowed to show any Indian films in the future but only Chinese and Russian films provided to them by the Ministry of Culture (Ch. *wenhua bu*).¹¹² The Tsakhur brothers grew increasingly concerned. Not only were they down to one Indian film every two months, they could only select Indian films from those made officially available by the Chinese government, with no access to the more popular ones available in India. To make matters worse, they were required to pay the Chinese government 40 percent of all ticket sales, as a rental fee, even though Chinese and Russian pictures attracted only fifty to sixty persons per showing and Indian movies "attract[ed] full houses."¹¹³ Although Indian consulate officials indicated their distress and were "completely at loss to understand as to why the Chinese have passed this order," the signs of change were all around them.

The Chinese treatment of the Tsakhur brothers could be seen in many other areas of Lhasa life. Beginning in 1956, Chinese officials began to stress the need for Tibetan traders to "concentrate on internal trade and to gradually lessen dependence on foreign trade."¹¹⁴ At the same time, Chinese officials promised "financial assistance" to local Khache traders if they would begin to challenge Nepali traders.¹¹⁵ Several months later, Abdul Aziz, the original owner of the Lhasa cinema, sensing the shifting balance of trade, began withdrawing assets from Tibet and transferring them to India. The Indian consul, in his monthly update on Tibet to the home office in New Delhi, remarked that such a step indicated something larger afoot, since "usually these Muslim traders have a shrewd idea of the shape of things to come and their precautions give us some clue to the possibility of greater control over trade in the near future."¹¹⁶

The following year, the Indian trade agent apprised his superiors of the fact that the "Chinese were trying their very best to push their [Chinese] consumer goods into the Tibetan markets by requiring Indian traders to pay exorbitant rents for

shops and storehouses,” while the Chinese were allowed to “merely requisition such houses and godowns [warehouses] at a very nominal rent.”¹¹⁷ At the same time, the Chinese government began to wean the Tibetan region from Tibetan currency by attempting to set the official conversion rate at an artificially high exchange rate, over and above its market-determined value. Their clumsy attempt to favor their Chinese silver dollars as a half-step to ultimately introduce Chinese paper currency floundered in the face of near-uniform displeasure from the Tibetan populace. As Goldstein described the failed effort, “The opposition was led by the abbots of the Big Three Monasteries, who were the money lenders in Tibet, and who did not want the Tibetan government to lose the ability to print and regulate Tibetan currency. Tibet therefore, continued to print and use its own money until the uprising of 1959.”¹¹⁸ Though the Chinese efforts were temporarily thwarted, they demonstrated China’s increasing desire to reintegrate Tibet into China in very real ways.¹¹⁹

In 1956, as the government in Tibet began to impose the regulations initiated by the treaties with India and Nepal, passports began to be required to leave or enter Tibet’s border with India and Nepal. Previously such a requirement had rarely been imposed. As a reaction to the crackdown, the Indian consulate in Lhasa saw a year-on-year 400 percent increase in visa requests between 1955 and 1956.¹²⁰ That same year the consul registered five Ladakhi Khaches and two Nepalese as Indian citizens. The Nepalese consul general started issuing passports in November 1958.¹²¹

Individuals whose identity did not fit neatly into the national categories Nepal, China, or India began to express their concern.¹²² The first were the Khatsara and the Tibetan wives of Nepalese citizens who were not consulted or even identified in the 1956 Sino-Nepalese Treaty (a notable oversight since significant consideration was given to them in the previous treaty with Tibet). Not surprisingly, such changes were not popular with the three hundred to four hundred Nepalese nationals who remained in Lhasa despite the economic downturn. Originally told they would be “given the choice to decide their future [citizenship],” by 1959, the Chinese government insisted that such individuals would first “be issued passports from the Chinese [government].” This was a significant shift: it meant they would need to accept Chinese citizenship before being allowed to leave Tibet in order to be granted Nepalese citizenship.¹²³

For smaller communities, like the Ladakhi Muslims in Lhasa, the new regulations put them in a challenging position. Many Ladakhi Muslims had registered as Indian citizens at the consulate, but nonetheless they deliberately attempted not to advertise their foreign status in order to be allowed to trade as Tibetans. Since the Sino-Indian Agreement of 1954 did not designate Lhasa and Shigatse as trade marts for Indians, it was illegal for them to carry on their livelihood as non-Tibetans.¹²⁴ The point often lost regarding the momentous events of 1959 is how few foreign nationals living in Lhasa pursued passports since they did not intend

to return to their home countries. Aside from the Khaches, Nepalese, Ladakhis, Khatsaras, and Indians who did travel back and forth with considerable consistency and ease between 1957 and 1958, few thought to procure a passport even as a safety precaution. In addition, given the swift downturn in foreign trade and the diminished number of foreign traders active in the trade that remained, the number of individuals needing passports remained quite limited.¹²⁵

As discussed in chapter 3, the Tibetan designations of ethnicity, identity, and mixed parentage were seldom employed or well understood by the Chinese, making it difficult for the affected individuals to know the proper actions to take for their specific status. The transition from the traditional context, where such definitions were rarely disputed or challenged, as in the case of Sherpa Gyalpo, to one where such categories were now being demanded by the government was challenging. That this transition occurred with the swiftness it did, essentially between 1957 and 1959, and without any mechanisms to identify those groups who did not fit neatly into the newly established national categories—or those who preferred to retain their pre-1951 Tibetan categories as long as they could under the regional Tibetan government—resulted in very few individuals conforming to the categories now imposed by the central government.

The fact is that this very question—the ambiguity that lay at the intersection of ethnicity, nation, and regional identity—was what prompted China's participation in the Bandung Conference. That this troublesome ambiguity facilitated its single most prominent diplomatic outcome, in the form of the agreement with Indonesia about the Overseas Chinese, suggests that such issues were not completely absent from the concerns of the central Chinese leadership. Yet China appears to have been working with two standards. There was one for defining and classifying Chinese outside of China, primarily with an eye to entice them to declare themselves as Chinese. There was another for defining ethnically different Chinese inside of China, primarily with an eye to prevent them from declaring themselves as anything other than Chinese. For the Overseas Chinese, ethnicity trumped any assertion of nationality as defined by place of birth, since China wanted as many Overseas Chinese as possible to have the option of selecting China as their nationality. Domestically, Chinese officials were especially sensitive to assertions that Tibet and Tibetans were not part of China (or were not Chinese). Given this heightened concern over Tibet being portrayed as not Chinese, the Chinese authorities sought to invert that logic by suggesting that, except in clear-cut situations in which individuals could prove their foreign identity (usually by birth), they would be treated as Chinese. To put this in a slightly different way, the Chinese government, although using similar logic in both situations, insisted that Chinese with dual citizenship abroad should be allowed to select their citizenship while those with similar cases in Tibet should not. In Indonesia, it did not matter to the Chinese government if the Overseas Chinese had arrived centuries earlier or just last week; all Overseas Chinese should be given the opportunity to select their

nationality based on their Chinese ethnicity. In Tibet, if you had foreign ancestry but had lived in Tibet, you were considered Chinese. Only if you had just arrived from a foreign country would you possibly be considered alien.

As demonstrated by the Chinese officials' increasing concern with the number and origin of Indian films being shown in Tibet and with their intent to exert control of them, the outward facade of normality that had been assiduously adhered to after their arrival in 1951 began by 1958 to crack. Internally, other indicators began to alert the residents of central Tibet to new political winds. Increasing numbers of Kham Tibetans from eastern Tibet began appearing in Lhasa, fleeing the increasingly harsh political reforms occurring outside of the administrative borders of the Tibet Autonomous Region. As the broader situation became clear, many in Lhasa, including the Dalai Lama, reevaluated Tibet's relationship with China's central government. It became clear that Tibet's limited autonomy was at an end.