



THREE TIBETANS

a 52 minute documentary which presents
Tibetans' life in Tibet and in exile offering
a glimpse of the choices open to them.

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cover photograph : sacred well in Sakya monastery, Tibet - © BAB

PRESENTATION

WORKSHEET

Duration

52 minutes

Format

High Definition Video

Shooting Location

France, London (UK),
Dharamsala (India),
Sershul (China)

Shooting time

Spring / Summer

Director

Christian Roche

Authors

Gilles Blaize / Sam Wangyal

Theme: contemporary Tibetan society and its stakes, in Tibet and in exile, seen through the daily life of three Tibetans.

Young monks from the Tibetan Autonomous Region, China - © BAB



Subject : The story of three Tibetans. The first one is an old man. Born in Tibet, he has known the monastery, life as a guerrilla fighting against the Chinese invasion, then exile and politics. He became a British citizen and is now running a Tibetan NGO. The second is a young businessman born in exile. Living in France, rarely without his mobile phone, he often goes out for the night, wearing traditional costume only for important events. The third is a middle-aged nomad mother from the high plateau that used to form eastern Tibet. Despite the political changes, her live remains dictated by natural elements. Following these three destinies and by interviewing political, religious and cultural authorities, Tibetans, Westerners or Chinese, we show the situation of the Tibetan people both in Tibet and in exile and the choices open to them.

PROPOSAL

young Tibetan playing football in Rumtek monastery, Sikkim - © BAB



Our intention in this documentary film is to unveil in 52 minutes the actual situation of Tibetans in their motherland and in exile, and to get an idea of their future.

To do so, we have decided to follow the daily life of three people who represent Tibetan society: an elderly diplomat born in Tibet and exiled in the United Kingdom; a young businessman born in India and living in France; a nomad woman, a mother, who has never moved from the high Tibetan plateau. These are lay people who go beyond the Tibetan caricature of the Buddhist monk meditating in the depths of his monastery. By their differences, they illustrate the identity and challenges of the Tibetan Diaspora, as well as hopes, inherent to this identity.

Treated as a news report, following the lives and thoughts of three people from the same root who are spread across the planet, this documentary is also presented as a story: the Tibetans' destiny. And their trajectory concerns all people. From the Chinese invasion to exile and emigration; from the theocratic system of the Dalai Lama to the practice of communism in Tibet or democracy in exile; from the protection of Tibetan culture, stored for centuries behind the secret vault of the Himalayas, to its recent dispersion in the West: Tibetan society is an example of human and cultural identity, losing its inimitable character, facing modern reality and its upheavals: mutation, society's globalisation, super power hegemony...

Practically speaking, our production steps will be dictated by the shooting agenda, which in turn will be determined by seasonal traditions, especially in Tibet where we will shoot the collection of medical plants and the annual nomads' meeting at the Sershul horse fair, or by the schedule of interviewees, such as the Dalai Lama.

Sam Wangyal and Gilles Blaize, the authors, and Christian Roche, the director, have been working on this project for a long time. Having established favoured contacts with members of the Tibetan community, as well as the Chinese authorities, they guarantee exclusive access to various sources and shooting permission in Tibet and in exile.

The High Definition is both a production and editorial choice. The video HD combines picture quality, ease during shooting compared to 35mm film and perspective of support conservation in the coming years, so this documentary can be a testimony for the next generation. Because if this film is dedicated to a wide audience, set on tradition and remote destinations, it is especially dedicated to the young, our heirs to the planet. Tibet has a millenary culture and wisdom. But how much time is left?

SYNOPSIS

Tibet: an independent and reclusive kingdom ruled by a monk king, the Dalai Lama. Until its invasion during the 1950s by Communist China and the flight of hundreds of thousands of Tibetans, including the Dalai Lama, to India. Since then, the Tibetan Diaspora has spread across the world.

Among these Tibetans stands the destiny of Phuntsog Wangyal. He was born almost 60 years ago in Tibet. A young monk, he joined the guerrilla force against the Chinese army, then fled to exile in India where he shared his time between study and politic. Becoming representative of the Dalai Lama in United Kingdom in the 1980s, he founded a non governmental organisation to help Tibetans and promote Tibetan culture across the globe. He is now a British citizen and lives in Greater London. The second destiny is Tenzin Tashi's. Born in exile in India more than twenty years ago, he left his Tibetan settlement at a very young age to settle with his family in France. After attending university in Paris, he became a businessman and started a trading business between Asia and Europe. The third destiny is that of a Tibetan woman, Pema Dondup. She lives on the high plateau in what was historically eastern Tibet, an area now incorporated in to the Chinese province of Sichuan. Nomad and mother, she has always lived on the high plateau and now earns her living collecting medical herbs for the county's Tibetan hospital.

Phuntsog Wangyal, one of our Tibetan Destinies, founder of Tibet Foundation, in Oxford, United Kingdom - © BAB



We will follow the daily movements of these three Tibetans, their ancestral habits as well as ones just adopted, and will reveal rifts created between them as well as bonds that unite them. We will also collect the opinions of political, religious and cultural authorities, Tibetans, Westerners or Chinese, to tackle five aspects that comprise Tibetan identity at the outset of the 21st century: Religion and Buddhism. If Buddhism is a fundamental feature of Tibetans, it is balancing between a new Western passion, a revival in China after years of repression, but also a diminishing interest among the new generation. Language and Education, where the challenge is to preserve Tibetan language while acquiring new languages to aspire to a high standard of education to empower the community. Medicine and Health. Tibetans in the West adopt the host

country healthcare system, while issues persist in Tibet and the Indian settlements, where traditional Tibetan medicine is rising from its ashes. Tibetan culture and society. On the one hand, young Tibetans try to emulate Western standards and the situation of women is improving, while on the other hand, the bonds among society remain very strong and the often spectacular Tibetan cultural events in China and the West are vital to preserve and promote this culture. The politics. In China, inequalities remain between Tibetans and Chinese, freedoms are still deprived, but the standard of living is improving. In exile, the Dalai Lama has opened offices across the world and a parliament has been elected with a prime minister in Dharamsala, India, showing how the old theocracy is evolving to towards democracy.

To conclude, we will consider the future of Tibet and the Tibetan people, which will be determined by the relationship between Beijing and Dharamsala. The two sides remain in deadlock but this could change with the Olympic Games in 2008 and the concern of Western countries. We will ask Phuntsog, Tenzin and Pema, and all the interviewees, what they consider the future holds for Tibet and her people. The final word will rest with the Dalai Lama.

TREATMENT

Kanchenjunga, 3rd world highest mountain
at the border of Nepal and Sikkim - © BAB



This documentary aims to reflect reality. Therefore, the style will be close to news reporting, the video camera frequently placed on the shoulder to follow the daily lives of the three Tibetans, and on the tripod during interviewees and to film landscapes. A narrator will provide information to link scenes. There will be no studio shooting and interviewees will be presented at their homes.

We will use High Definition Video to give us very high quality for the portraits of Tibetan, Indian and European landscapes, and for the colours that abound in Tibetan culture. Moreover, the use of video instead of 16 mm or 35 mm film will require a smaller shooting team and lighter logistics, which are not negligible considerations when

one has to shoot in remote places such as the high Tibetan plateau.

To vary our angles of approach, we will use archives, especially when we refer to historical facts, and infographic content to synthesise general information and help viewers absorb figures and statistics.

The soundtrack will be principally composed of original Tibetan music, both traditional and modern, along with tracks of Indian and Western music according to the location and time of the story. Generally, we will be very cautious to choose relevant music to sensitively reflect the atmosphere radiating from the pictures.

Since the principal characters will be speaking in various languages, we intend to cast voices to dub Tenzin Tashi, Pema Dondup and the interviewees who do not speak English. Casting will be also required to choose the narrative voice.

PRESS CUTTING

Tibet ready to sacrifice sovereignty, says leader

By Richard Spencer in Beijing (Daily Telegraph 14/03/2005)

The Dalai Lama held out a hefty olive branch to China yesterday, making his most positive comments about Beijing's rule over Tibet since fleeing into exile more than half a century ago.

Tibet wanted modernisation and was prepared to sacrifice sovereignty so that it could benefit from China's economic growth, he said in an interview.

"We are willing to be part of the People's Republic of China, to have it govern and guarantee to preserve our Tibetan culture, spirituality and our environment," he told the South China Morning Post. His comments suggested a renewed diplomatic offensive by the Tibetan government-in-exile in the lead up to the Dalai Lama's 70th birthday in July.

The Tibetan diaspora is deeply concerned by his advancing age. Though he is physically fit, his supporters are afraid that if he dies in exile, China would exert control over the choice of his successor and thus Tibetan Buddhism's very future.

The Dalai Lama has repeatedly sought to negotiate terms under which he could return to Tibet, which he fled in 1959 in the face of Chinese repression. He has already said he would accept Chinese sovereignty over Tibet but insisted on real autonomy over its religious and cultural life. It is currently an "autonomous region", a term which in reality gives it negligible difference in status from any other province.

But the interview suggests that the Dalai Lama might be prepared to accept this. "This is the message I wish to deliver to China," he said. "I am not in favour of separation. Tibet is a part of the People's Republic of China. It is an autonomous region of the People's Republic of China. Tibetan culture and Buddhism are part of Chinese culture."

In contrast to many critics, he also welcomed the economic development that being part of China could bring, including the controversial railway being built to link Lhasa, Tibet's capital, to the rest of the country.

"As the material development of China moves forward we gain materially, like the railway," he said. Critics say the primary beneficiaries from the network's expansion are the hundreds of thousands of Han Chinese who have migrated to Tibet.

Alison Reynolds, director of the Free Tibet Campaign, said the Dalai Lama had not accepted a key Chinese demand, that he acknowledge that Tibet had always been part of China.

"I think he was keen to re-emphasise aspects that the Chinese could be responsive to," she said.

Tsering Tashi, a spokesman for the Tibetan government-in-exile, called on the Chinese government to respond. "Unfortunately, from the Chinese side it's always a very, very negative attitude," he said.

He admitted that the Dalai Lama's concessions over sovereignty had been unpopular with many Tibetans in exile. "His Holiness has great moral authority," he said. "But the younger Tibetan generation seems to be growing up a bit frustrated because all these non-violent initiatives are not producing any response."

Tibet and China: Two Distinct Views*

(www.rangzen.org)

The Chinese History of Tibet

Tibet has been part of China since the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368). Centuries ago Mongol and Manchu Emperors ruled or influenced large parts of Asia. During the Tang period (618-907), the Tibetan King, Songsten Gampo, married Princess Wen Cheng. The Princess is thought to have had a lot of influence in Tibet. During the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), Tibet was part of the Mongol Empire which was under Yuan rule. At this time, the Yuan Government implemented residence registration, levied taxes, and imposed corvee duties in Tibet. China's "White Paper" claims that the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) "replaced the Yuan dynasty in China and inherited the right to rule Tibet." During the Manchu rule (1644-1911), the Qing army on a number of occasions entered Tibet to protect it. Finally, in 1951, China and the Tibetan Local Government signed a 17-point agreement concerning the peaceful liberation of Tibet. During this time, The 14th Dalai Lama supported this liberation and acknowledged Tibet is one part of China.

The Tibetan History of Tibet

Tibet has a recorded history of statehood extending back to 127 B.C. In the seventh to ninth centuries, the Tibetans often bested the Tang dynasty in battle. Additionally, during this dynasty, the marriage of Princess Wen Cheng and King Gampo was viewed as a strategic move to achieve cooperation and peace between Tibet and China. In 821, after centuries of periodic fighting, China and Tibet signed a treaty where boundaries were confirmed, and each country promised respect for the other's territorial sovereignty. During the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), the Mongol leader, Genghis Khan, conquered most of Eurasia including China. Thus, instead of China claiming a right to Tibet, Mongolia could assert claim to both China and Tibet. There is no historic evidence to support the assumption that the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) ruled Tibet. In fact, the Qing Emperor in 1652 not only accepted The Fifth Dalai Lama as a leader of an independent state, the Emperor also treated Him as a Divinity on Earth. During this period, Tibet was known in Chinese as Wu-si Zang or Wu-si Guo (guo meaning country). During the Manchu rule (1644-1911), the Qing army was asked by Tibetans to settle disputes. But, this does not support China's right to Tibet. If it did, then the U.S.A. should claim Kuwait and Haiti since it assisted these countries. In fact, on a number of occasions, Tibet exercised power over China, suggesting that perhaps Tibet should claim China! At the time of China's invasion in 1949, Tibet possessed all the attributes of an independent country recognized by international law, including a defined territory, a government, tax system, unique currency, unique postal system and stamps, army, and the ability to carry out international relations. Two years later, the 17-point agreement was imposed on the Tibetan Government by the threat of arms after 40,000 PLA troops had already seized Tibet's eastern provincial capital, Chamdo. The Tibetan delegates were threatened. The seal of the Tibetan Government was forged by Peking. In Tibet, The 14th Dalai Lama could not freely express His disapproval. However, soon after arriving in India, He repudiated this Agreement stating it was "thrust upon the Tibetan Government and people by the threat of arms." If Tibet had always been a part of China, why was there a need for the 17-point agreement? Finally, the Atlas of Chinese History Maps (published by Chinese Social Science Institute in Beijing) depicts Tibet as an independent country that was never part of China at least before 1280.

World Governments Do Not Recognize Tibet: China's Perspective

China asserts that no country has ever recognized Tibet. China also contends that Britain masterminded the Simla Conference (1913-1914) in collusion with Tibetan pro-British individuals. Both wanted to separate Tibet from China. At the time of the Simla Conference, even though the "McMahon Line" was negotiated between Tibet and Britain, at the end of the tripartite conference on Tibet's status and boundaries, Chinese officials who were present refused to recognize the "Line" on the grounds that Tibet was subordinate to China and had no power to make any treaties.

World Governments Recognize Tibet: The Tibetan Perspective

International law states that recognition can occur by explicit or implicit acts including treaties, negotiations, and diplomatic relations. Mongolia and Tibet signed a formal treaty of recognition in 1913. Historically, Nepal and Tibet had peace treaties. Tibet's independence was also confirmed at the Treaty of Simla (1914) which was concluded by Tibet and British India. In 1949, Tibet maintained diplomatic, economic, and cultural relations with such countries as Nepal, Sikkim, Mongolia, China, British India, and to some extent, Russia and Japan. Further, Nepal maintained an Ambassador in Lhasa and told the U.N. in 1949 that it conducted international relations with Tibet. In fact, Britain, Bhutan, India, and even China also maintained diplomatic missions in Tibet's capitol, Lhasa. The Tibetan Foreign Office conducted talks with President Franklin D. Roosevelt when he sent representatives to Lhasa to discuss the allied war effort against Japan during World War II. In 1950, El Salvador formally requested that China's aggression against Tibet be placed on the agenda of the U.N. General Assembly. The issue was not discussed. However, during four U.N. General Assembly debates on Tibet (1959, 1960, 1961, & 1965), many countries (e.g., Philippines, Nicaragua, Thailand, United States, Ireland) openly stated that Tibet was an independent country illegally occupied by China. In fact, the U.N. passed three resolutions (1959, 1961, & 1965) concerning Tibet stating that Tibetans were deprived of their inalienable rights to self-determination. Even Mao Zedong during the Long March admitted that Tibet was an independent country when he passed through the border regions of Tibet remarking, "This is our only foreign debt, and some day we must pay the Mantzu (sic) and the Tibetans for the provisions we were obliged to take from them." Tibetans clearly constitute a people under international law, as described, for instance, by the UNESCO International Meeting of Experts on Further Study of the Concept of the Rights of Peoples. They are a distinct people and fulfill all the characteristics of this concept: commonality of history, shared language, culture, and ethnicity.

Tibet Was Liberated: China's Perspective

China states that its invasion and occupation of Tibet was designed to liberate Tibetans from medieval feudal serfdom and slavery. Tibetan serfs were thought to have no freedoms. They were regarded by their masters as talking animals. China argues that the masses of Tibetan serfs lived in extreme poverty. Since the liberation in 1959, China asserts that Tibetans have enjoyed all rights of equality and they have embarked on the road of freedom and happiness. China claims that Tibet is now a modernized community benefitting from economic growth and social progress. Millions of serfs are now the masters of their fate, and large numbers of Tibetan workers, intellectuals, and officials have taken up the task of building and managing Tibet. China argues that all Tibetans now have equal rights in politics, the economy, and in their daily life. Tibetans are also thought to enjoy full religious freedom. China claims that Tibetans have greatly benefitted from their presence. There are now over 2,500 primary schools in Tibet. Moreover, according to China's White Paper, China has invested 1.1 billion yuans to develop education in Tibet. Big strides have been made in education, science, culture, and public health. For instance, China argues that it has rebuilt Tibetan Monasteries, Nunneries, and monuments. Further, it asserts that the Tibetan population has soared to 2 million from 1 million in the 1950's. China also claims that the Tibetans fully support the Communist Party and Government officials in Tibet. China argues that negotiation is the only solution for Tibet, stating that The 14th Dalai Lama should size up the situation, go with the tide of historical development and make a correct choice.

Tibet Was Not Liberated: The Tibetan Perspective

Old Tibet was not perfect. The current Dalai Lama has admitted this. However, The 14th Dalai Lama initiated far-reaching reforms in Tibet as soon as He assumed temporal authority. Throughout Tibet's history, the mistreatment of peasants was forbidden by law and social norms. The largest portion of land in Tibet was held by peasants. Famine and starvation were unheard of in Tibet. The "liberation" has resulted in the death of over 1.2 million Tibetans and the destruction of over 6,000 Tibetan Monasteries and cultural centers. Before the "liberation"

in 1959, the population of Tibet was 6 million. Prior to the invasion, Tibet was a simple and self-reliant nation with a very rich cultural heritage. Tibet's citizens, in comparison to its' neighbors, enjoyed much greater freedom. Currently, Tibetans have become veritable serfs. In independent Tibet, over 6,000 Monasteries and Nunneries served as schools. Most were destroyed, and many have been reconstructed as result of Tibetan finances and labor. The teachers in China's "new schools" are unqualified to teach the Tibetan language, culture, or history. Chinese students are the main beneficiaries of these schools. Since 1980, over 15,000 Tibetan children have fled Tibet to receive education in India. The primary beneficiaries of China's presence in Tibet have been the Chinese settlers, their government and military, and their business enterprises. Former Communist Party Secretary, Hu Yaobang, even admitted in 1980 that the living standard of Tibetans had declined since 1959 and that the large Chinese presence was an obstacle to development. China's policies in Tibet do not even receive full support from Tibetan cadres, let alone the Tibetan people. China has never found a trustworthy Tibetan to serve in a key government post in Tibet. For the past 21 years, The Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government In-Exile have offered a number of proposals for negotiations for the mutual benefit of Tibet and China. All have been ignored or rejected by China.

*Note. These views were extracted from various Tibetan and Chinese printed materials.

Refugee from a forgotten land

By Chris Summers (BBC News Online 08/03/2005)

Campaigners marked Free Tibet Day on Saturday by marching through London and demanding the UK Prime Minister Tony Blair raise the issue of Tibet when he visits China next month. BBC News Online talked to a Tibetan political refugee.

Pafang was a boy monk, aged 13, when he decided to flee his home in the Amdo region of northern Tibet and trek across the Himalayas to India.

"In Tibet we had never heard of the Free Tibet Campaign or even of the Dalai Lama. Everything we learned at school was what the Chinese wanted us to believe," he told BBC News Online.

Pafang, now 26, is one of 250 Tibetan refugees who live in Britain and was among around 2,000 protesters taking part in Saturday's demonstration in London.

Tibet timeline

1850-1913: Britain, China and Russia vie for control of Tibet

1913: Tibet takes advantage of revolution in Peking to declare independence

Oct 1950: 40,000 Chinese troops invade Tibet and annex it

1959: National uprising against Chinese rule. At least 100,000 Tibetans killed and another 100,000 flee into exile in India with Dalai Lama

1966: Many Buddhist monasteries destroyed and monks sent to labour camps during Cultural Revolution

1989: Dalai Lama, a devotee of non-violent resistance, receives Nobel Peace Prize. He accepts Tibetan independence is not achievable but calls for genuine autonomy.

1995: Dalai Lama selects six-year-old boy as 11th Panchen Lama. China rejects his choice and enthrones its own Panchen.

The demo, organised by the Free Tibet Campaign, aims to bring pressure on Mr Blair to raise the issue of Tibet when he visits China next month to meet the country's new leader Hu Jintao.

Tibet has been part of the People's Republic of China since 1950 when Mao sent troops in to end the country's brief period of independence.

In 1965 a Tibet Autonomous Region was created but parts of historical Tibet, such as the Amdo region where Pafang lived, were transferred to neighbouring provinces.

Pafang said he grew up forbidden to speak the Tibetan language.

He became a Buddhist monk at the age of 12 but he said he soon came to resent the restrictions on his religion.

"I wanted to study Tibetan culture and Buddhism but the monasteries in Tibet are controlled by the government and you have to pass exams in communist political studies to be allowed to stay there. If you don't pass you have to leave," said Pafang.

The Dalai Lama

The Dalai Lama preaches passive resistance. He said: "One day I went on a pilgrimage to a holy place called Mount Kalish. I met a group of Buddhists who wanted to go to India to meet the Dalai Lama. They said 'Why don't you come?'"

"So I packed my belongings and went with them. It took 30 days to cross the Himalayas on foot with our food and clothes on our back."

After time in a refugee centre in Nepal, Pafang went to live in a Buddhist temple near Bangalore in southern India and got to meet the Dalai Lama, who has been in exile since 1959.

The Dalai Lama continues to preach passive resistance to Chinese rule, something which Pafang supports - but he says many Tibetans are becoming disillusioned with the lack of results of this strategy.

Countries like Britain are not interested in helping us because they all do business with China and they don't want to endanger all this trade, which is worth billions.

Pafang

Tibetan refugee

In 1988 the Dalai Lama accepted independence was not achievable and instead demanded greater autonomy for Tibet.

Pafang said the number of Chinese soldiers in Tibet outnumbered the ethnic Tibetan population. He said Beijing had also swamped the region with Han Chinese settlers.

But Lu Wenxiang, the press counsellor at the Chinese Embassy in London, said: "Historically, since at least the 5th Century Tibet has been part of China and it is not true to say we invaded or annexed it."

"The People's Liberation Army was invited into Tibet as part of the 17-Point Agreement which was signed by the local government, headed by Dalai Lama."

He said: "The Dalai Lama is free to return to Tibet but he must publicly declare that Tibet is an inalienable part of China and recognise the supremacy of the central government. He must stop all activities aimed at splitting up the country."

Pafang returned to Tibet in 1993 and spent a year there hiding from the authorities before fleeing with his younger brother Tenzin.

Historically, since at least the 5th Century Tibet has been part of China and it is not true to say we invaded or annexed it.

Lu Wenxiang

Chinese Embassy spokesman

He wrote dozens of letters to his parents, and two other brothers who remain in Tibet, but all have been intercepted.

Pafang came to Britain two years ago with Tenzin and claimed political asylum in the UK.

Last year he managed to speak to his parents on the telephone for the first time in nearly a decade.

"It was quite emotional. I spent hours on the phone to them but we didn't talk about politics because I didn't want to get them in trouble. We just talked about the family," he said.

Pafang, who now works in a customer service centre, dreams that one day he can return to a free Tibet but he says: "Countries like Britain are not interested in helping us because they all do business with China and they don't want to endanger all this trade, which is worth billions"

We believe there will only be such a settlement on the basis of negotiations and taking into account the wishes of the Tibetan people.

British Foreign Office spokesman

A British Foreign Office spokesman said: "Tibet has never been internationally recognised as an independent state and no state recognises Tibet as independent.

"It's not for us to prescribe the nature of a lasting political settlement in Tibet but we believe there will only be such a settlement on the basis of negotiations and taking into account the wishes of the Tibetan people."

Names have been changed to protect those involved.