

Die Beweise sind schlüssig: Tibet ist kein Teil Chinas!

Die Buchtaufe für das Buch «Tibet erklärt» von Michael van Walt van Praag und und Miek Boltjes am 28.01.2024 im Sphères in Zürich war ein ausgesprochen interessanter und bereichernder Event!

Ganzes Interview mit Michael van Walt van Praag auf English

1. Question:

Where did your interest about the international law or the law of nations come from?

Michael

My interest in international law came already from an early age wanting to do something to be helpful and to help others. But in particular I suppose that my parents must have instilled me with a very strong sense of justice and the need to fight for justice. They had both been in the resistance under Nazi German occupation in the Netherlands during the war. My mother was imprisoned by the Gestapo. My father also was arrested and then escaped. So I think that their experience during the war somehow enabled me to understand what life is like under occupation. What injustice is and that it existed in the world and I wanted to do something to right some wrongs.

2. Question: Why did you write this book and what were the most important findings of your research?

Michael

The book was part of a project that took more than 10 years and was set up to answer three questions really. The first question I wanted to answer was: what was the nature of relations between states and rulers or between empires and their rulers in Asia over history? Why is it that we have such different perceptions of that history from different angles? The Chinese perception, the Mongolian perception, the Tibetan perception, the Indian perception, the Russian perception, the Japanese, etc.

Why is that? Where did that come from? And how can we understand it?

That was the first question and the outcome of that process. And we worked for that with about 75 scholars around the world in seminars in different universities. Scholars from Japan, Korea, China, from the PRC, from Tibet, from Iran, from all over the world. The result of that was a book called "Sacred mandates: Asian international relations since Chinggis Khan". It is a more academic book. This book (Tibet erklärt) is more policy oriented.

The second question we wanted to answer was a very specific question, since there's two clearly different points of view from the Chinese perspective and the Tibetan perspective, "Was Tibet a part of China historically?", and if so, when did it become part of China? How did that happen? And what are the consequences of whatever the answer to that question would be for today?

And the third is, what would the answers to these two questions mean, in terms of the reality of what can be done. So that was really the object of the project.

And again, for the second book, which is this one, we worked with scholars around the world again. So altogether, I think we worked with over 100 top scholars around the world. Both, this book and the other one, are the result of looking at source materials, original source material from Chinese ones, Manchu ones, Mongol ones, Tibetan ones, and many, many others. And in some sense, it is perhaps one of the

most comprehensive studies that have taken place. Which is why it took so long. All of this was done not just by myself, but together with Miek Boltjes, who is the co-author of the book.

The most important outcomes of at least this Tibet erklärt book are, that we discovered to some of our surprise, that Tibet, in fact, was never a part of China. Not just that it was not a part of China at the time that the PRC invaded Tibet, but it was never a part of China. And the interesting thing is that two, three days ago, I was in Estonia, for a parliamentary hearing on the status of Tibet. And one of the other people testifying was Professor Lau, some of you may have heard him speak as well. So the interesting thing is that whereas we used sources from different perspectives and different languages, he also did research for about 10 years, and came out with a huge book in Chinese which has been translated into English now. He used only official or sanctioned Chinese language imperial sources. Not only that, only Chinese language sources that the PRC has republished, and has made available. In other words, they have been approved by the PRC. Based on his study of all those sources, which he reproduces in great detail in his book, he comes to exactly the same conclusion: that Tibet was, in fact, never a part of China.

Not only that: the various Imperial dynasties that ruled China did not consider Tibet to be part of China. And that comes out quite clearly in his analysis.

So it's very interesting that we both come out with the same conclusion.

3. Question: Why is that important today? Your book, your work, your kind of view?

Michael

Well, it's important, I think, because whether Tibet was or was not part of China, historically, is not just an academic interest. Which is why this book is not an academic book. It's not theory for the people that bear the consequences of whether Tibet was part of China or not. We've all seen the consequences of Russian invasion of the Ukraine. What happened in Tibet was very similar, except that the war lasted much shorter, because the Tibetan army was so small and was defeated so quickly. But essentially, the scenarios are the same. A big power takes over a small one, and uses as its only legitimation a historical narrative, that this area was actually always part of the greater country. Both politically, culturally, ethnically, all these arguments are being brought. That it actually never existed as a truly independent country and has no rights. Putin's speech the night before the invasion could have been taken from the Chinese white book on Tibet. All the same points were mentioned. And I don't think he took it from that white book. But it means that the mentality is the same. The great Russian thought of some of these autocrats is the same as the great Chinese thought of some of the PRC leaders. So in that sense, it is not theory. It is the very mentality that creates what we see happening in Tibet. And what you read about the extinction even of the name "Tibet" is a reflection of that. It is erasing Tibet from the consciousness of the world, and even the consciousness of the Tibetans. So, the point is, in other words, it's important because it relates exactly to what is happening and the reasons China gives for what it's doing. China has never provided any other justification for being in Tibet, except the historical one. And at the same time, China feels that it does not have legitimacy in Tibet, because it knows that this historical narrative is not true. That Tibet was not always a part of China. And so that is why it wants His Holiness the Dalai Lama to make a statement that Tibet was since ancient times part of China. That is why they go to all our governments and pressure them to say Tibet is part of China, because the PCR does not have legitimacy from the Tibetans or for any other

reason. And so it is trying to get it from our governments. And from the Dalai Lama, and since the Dalai Lama was not saying it, our governments are providing it.

That is what we're trying to turn around to change. And for that, you have to have proof that Tibet was not a part of China. And for Tibetans, it is important that they have the self-confidence, to be able to know that this is the case. That Tibet was not part of China. And to be able to explain it, to be able to respond to questions and challenges. Hopefully, this book will help them. And will help us or anybody who is advocating on behalf of Tibet to make the arguments the way they should be made.

The second reason why it's very important is because it provides very clearly what the rights of the Tibetans are. What the rights of the Tibetans as a state, as a country are, and what the rights of the Tibetans as a people are. And we all know, that so often in the press, and so many of us even carelessly talk about Tibetans as a minority. When we talk about Tibetans as a minority, that implies that they are part of China. That they are China's minority. Tibetans are not a minority, they are a people. And as a people, which we argue here as well, they have certain rights as a people. The full right to self-determination, which includes independence, if that's what Tibetans want. It can be autonomy, it can be integration with China, it can be integration with India, or with Switzerland if they want. In other words, the right to self-determination is simply the right to determine your own status, political status and legal status, your own cultural, economic and social development, free of outside interference. That's the official UN definition of the right to self-determination.

And because Tibetans are a people and not a minority, they have that right. And so that's why it is so important to be able to show that Tibetans are a people and not only that, to consistently use the right language. To correct our governments when they talk about Tibetans as a minority, to correct the press, somebody writing an article, when they talk about the Tibetans as an ethnic group or religious group rather than a people.

So, these are quite essential things that have an impact today and in the way we can be advocates for a solution.

The other thing that becomes clear is that it is an international conflict between Tibet and China. It is an international conflict still today. It is a conflict about the occupation, the illegal occupation of a state. It is not a struggle for human rights. Yes, human rights are important, they need to be fought for. But the human rights are just a consequence of the occupation. Environmental issues are a consequence of the occupation and China's policies in Tibet.

So what this book also shows is that the China-Tibet conflict is an international conflict and therefore, the responsibility of the international community to help resolve. And it is not an internal affair of China. So when you talk to foreign ministry officials about this, they're very afraid to accept this. But I think by pushing them slowly, they will, because it's already policy in most European countries, as you have read, to promote a negotiated solution. So there's already some sense of international responsibility. But we have to press that so that it is stronger. And then very concretely, every time a country's government makes a statement that Tibet is part of China, they are violating international law. And this needs to be pointed out. We've now all been reminded of the fundamental pillar of international law, the pillar of our international order, which is that one country cannot take territory of another by force. And not only that, that the rest of the world is not allowed to recognize that type of annexation. So we've been reminded of that now, because the entire international community agrees that you cannot recognize the occupation of territory by Russia in Ukraine. We are forbidden from recognizing that that occupied territory is now Russia. Exactly the same applies with Tibet! We are not allowed to recognize that Tibet is part of China. And that needs to be pointed out to our governments. Again, it makes them

very nervous, because they cite the One China policy and so on. The One China policy has nothing to do with Tibet, that's an issue for Taiwan. Tibet never claimed to be the government of China. Tibet never claimed they belonged to China. It only claimed it was not part of the One China. So it has nothing to do with it. But governments will respond that way.

So I think we need to be informed, as I say confident, and simply explain to them, what their duties and consequences are. And then finally, the very important consequence of our government's appeasing behaviour towards China — particularly governments in the West — is to make China a strong bully. The policy of appeasement on Tibet, allowing China to benefit from having taken Tibet, not contesting China's sovereignty over Tibet, has created in China a bully, that believes it can do that elsewhere as well. This is why it is behaving this way in the South China Sea. Why it is being aggressive in relation to Taiwan, and definitely why it is claiming all this enormous amount of territory in northern India, a huge amount of territory in Arunachal Pradesh, and in Ladakh area. It is only because it claims that those territories were either part of Tibet or were tributaries of Tibet. And that is a direct consequence. One might even say that Russia has seen how the world has reacted to the invasion of Tibet and that may have also encouraged it among many other things to feel that if it only could stay in Ukraine a certain amount of time, it would also be accepted by the world.

4. Question: Can you give as a short definition of the term or the idea of Sinic?

Michael

So "Sinic" in English means a couple of things, either (1) Chinese, kind of equivalent to the adjective Chinese, or (2) something greater than that: Chinese cultural, political, ideological influence. And it's critical to use this kind of concept, because there's a whole area of Asia, East Asia, essentially, but also Southeast Asia, where the political, cultural, hierarchical ideology or constructs, including those of international relations, were for very long time in history determined in accordance with Confucian principles, and cultural principles that came from Chinese culture. All of this is 'Sinic', belongs to the Sinic civilizational world, but it is not necessarily 'Chinese'.

And so if we just say Chinese, then that has a political connotation that this belongs to China.

But this cultural world was bigger, in the same way that the Tibetan Buddhist world was bigger than only Tibet, the political Tibet. As you know, in southern Himalayas, there are also Tibetan Buddhist states, groups of people, populations, etc. and Mongolia is also Tibetan Buddhist, or one can call it Tibetan-Mongolian Buddhism. There are also Tibetan Buddhists in Tuva, Buryatia and Kalmukya. In other words, there are in Asia areas of cultural political, ideological, religious influence, that are bigger than just a political entity and so that's what we mean by the "Tibetan Buddhist world" and the "Sinic-Confucian world".

Question 5 was already answered. How did the sino-centric view of the Chinese culture influence their historical ideology?

Question 6: the relations between the Mongolian emperors and the Tibetan religious leaders: how did they work?

Michael

Yes, and I didn't answer your second part of the question about how the "sinic" perception effects. But I will answer that then as part of this question. What I'm explaining now is particularly explained in detail in the first book, that is the result of the first part of the project, how did international relations work in Asia over historical times. But it's also explained a little bit more concisely here.

The point is this: Today, we have one system of international law for all countries. And so that means that we just have one way of interpreting whether a country is independent or not, whether a government is legitimate or not, whether we recognize the government or don't recognize the government, whether aggression is allowed or not. All those questions are determined by one system only. And so we're used to thinking that way.

But in Asia, before the beginning of the 20th century, that was not the case. There were different systems of international law. Different systems of rule, different ways of interpreting relations between rulers or between countries. Different ways of considering what it means to be sovereign or not sovereign, all these things.

And in the area that we looked at Inner and East Asia, this was determined mostly by three different systems of international law if you like. The "Sinic" system: in other words, the Chinese influenced political system, the Tibetan Buddhist system, and the Mongolian Chinggisid system. And Chinggisid system just comes from the word Chinggis (or Genghis) Khan. In other words, that is a system that was set in place by Chinggis Khan and his successors. In Europe and in China, we have for centuries tried to minimize the importance of the Mongolian empire, what Chinggis Khan meant, and so forth, we just think it's a small area in Central Asia that has not had much influence in the world. But if you really study what happened in Asia and Europe, you find that more than any other people or power, Mongols have had influence on almost everything that we have today. In terms of conception of states, in terms of the way we rule, in cultural terms, in food, and all kinds of things. Why? Because the Mongol Empire was so enormous. It spread all the way from the Pacific, to Hungary, to Palestine, it was an enormous empire. And it continued for centuries. And it had much more influence actually, than the Chinese, ultimately. The same with the Tibetan Buddhist world, we also think of it, in most of the world, as a small, not very relevant concept. And yet, the Tibetan Buddhist world was very strong and mighty for an enormous amount of time. And it impacted the Mongols, and because of that, it spread also.

So it's these three worlds that determined how relations were and each had their own interpretations. And in those days, it was perfectly alright to have different interpretations of relations. And this is why you can see if you read Chinese source materials of the various empires, that they see their relations with the Mongols and with the Tibetans in a certain way, it corresponds to their theory. And if you look at the way the Tibetans conceive of their relations with the Mongols, or with the Manchus or with the Chinese, you will see a different interpretation. And they're both valid, and they're both alright.

And so I don't think that the Sinic view of viewing the emperor as the center of the world and everybody else as being less is wrong in itself, where everybody else is being seen as subjects of the Emperor — whether you lived in Holland, or in Portugal, or in Tibet, or in Vietnam. You were all subjects of the emperor in a certain sense, because the emperor was the son of heaven, just as we believed in the past, you know, in Europe, that that royalty was designated by God. And so that is simply a framework to understand the world. And it's alright that the Chinese saw it that way. But it is equally right for the Tibetans and the Mongolians and others to see it a different way. They were all legitimate interpretations of relations. They were just constructs, systems to understand each other, and to respect relations between them. And so the interesting thing is that both the Chinese and the Tibetans knew that they each interpreted their relations differently and that was all right. The relations between

the Mongols and the Tibetans were created and maintained and were interpreted in accordance with the Mongolian point of view, the Chinggisid Mongol system, from the Tibetan point of view from the Tibetan Buddhist system. But because the Mongols also became Tibetan Buddhist, the relationship between Tibet and the Mongolians was determined primarily on the basis of Teacher-Patron relationship. Which means in Tibetan the "Cho-yon" relation, meaning the Lama-devotee or the Lama-disciple relation, or the Lama and the one gives offerings to the Lama: that type of relationship. But that had also a political element to it, which was the protection by the patron (the disciple) of the Lama and his monastic community, his religion and his country. And this is what later, the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China have reinterpreted to mean that somehow Tibet was ruled by the patron, that is by the disciple, instead of appreciating the relationship the way it really was.

7. Question: Can you explain the term of prescriptive acquisition? Some people think times makes legitimacy.

Michael

So what happens? And I hear that from many people, there is this notion that we have in the back of our minds, that if somebody occupies a country long enough, at some point, it becomes theirs. Part of the reason why we believe this is because in our national laws and our normal laws, if you occupy a house or an apartment long enough, in some countries, in some places, it becomes yours. If there's no challenge, then it becomes yours. The same happens if you steal something and after 20 years, the crime is no longer a crime. In other words, there's a period of time after which criminal activity is no longer considered criminal or no longer can be prosecuted.

In international law, the crime of aggression *never* has an end to it. And so, you cannot say, because Tibet was occupied has been occupied and controlled by China for 70 years, now it is Chinese, that is simply not correct.

8. Question: How important is the Tibetan resistance against the Chinese occupation and why?

Michael

Well, it relates to what I just said before. There is an exception to the rule that I just mentioned: the rule, that no matter how long you control a territory it cannot become yours if you took it by force. That is the rule. But if an occupied people or their legitimate representative, for example a government of an occupied state, *freely accepts* the rule of the aggressor, then it can become part of the territory of the aggressor through 'prescription'. This could also happen if such acceptance is the result of a peace process or genuine negotiations. Right.

So, if Tibetans were to say fine, we're happy under Chinese rule, we no longer contest it, we no longer argue against it, then international law would say well, okay, then the conflict is resolved. It is now part of China, because nobody is objecting to that in the country itself.

So that is why it is so important that the Tibetan government in exile continue to formally protest China's occupation of Tibet and continue to insist that Tibet is not part of China, and was not historically part of China. And it is also crucial that the Tibetan people, especially in Tibet, continue to resist Chinese occupation and China's claim that Tibet is part of China. And both have happened in different ways.

We show in the book that the Tibetan government in exile has been very consistent. Except perhaps, during the eight to 10 years of the dialogue with China—when the CTA tried to not say anything that would irritate the PRC. During those years in the official Tibetan statements, you don't see much about occupation and aggression. But immediately after the talks ended the CTA reestablished this language. And before that also very consistently, and today also very forcefully and consistently the CTA refers to the invasion and occupation of Tibet and the illegality/illegitimacy of China's rule of Tibet. And it refers to the Sino-Tibetan conflict, meaning the conflict is not resolved.

And the people in Tibet have consistently either through uprisings, through demonstrations, through literature, through songs, through burning themselves, I mean, what stronger way of expressing your disapproval? All these things help to show that Tibetans have not accepted PRC rule and that the conflict is not resolved.

9. Question: Please tell us something about your experience during the protests, which led to the independency of East Timor.

Michael

You all know East Timor was occupied by Indonesia for 25 years. And then a financial crisis happened in Southeast Asia, including in Indonesia. That brought down the government of Indonesia. So the government, the 'strongman' government of Suharto had to resign. That created a very short opportunity to change things in relation to East Timor and in relation to Ache and in relation to West Papua—all areas that had been taken by Indonesia at the time of decolonization and after.

So, what I learned from that, and what I learned also from working with the Baltic states, before the Soviet Union broke up — they had been occupied for 50 years by the Soviet Union. And when the Soviet Union broke up, there was again, a very short opportunity for them to reestablish their independence.

What I've learned from both these situations is that opportunities *do arise* to bring about change in unexpected ways.

In the Soviet Union, it was because the Soviet war in Afghanistan had lasted too long and was too expensive. And because an actor in the United States (Ronald Reagan) became president who increased pressure on Russia with new armaments, new rhetoric, etc. And those combined things and other factors as well caused change. And, of course, the rise of Gorbachev who had different ideas caused ultimately the breakup of the Soviet Union.

But what is often forgotten is that the Baltic states were very instrumental in creating the breakup of the Soviet Union. In other words, there was agency in those who wanted to regain independence. It wasn't just that it happened. They worked for it. They were prepared for it. They had years of very good preparation among themselves. They had alternative parliaments that were pushing for this, that were developing relations internationally to get international support, etc.

So I worked on that for a number of years with them. So I understood what was going on. And I could actually see it happening when many people in the West still could not believe that the Soviet Union will ever break up, that this will ever happen.

East Timor, the same thing. Nobody believed that East Timor, a tiny island that was occupied by this enormous Indonesian power—relatively speaking a much bigger difference than between China and Tibet—that it would ever regain its independence. And yet, because of an unexpected economic crisis the opportunity was created. And because the East Timorese were extremely well organized. Only a

few years earlier, we'd had this big conference where all the different factions, the different parties, the military, and the nonviolent ones, and everybody, everybody came together as one front. And they had very good diplomats. They took the opportunity while it lasted, and they became independent.

So the lesson from that is for the Tibet movement: The most important thing is (1) there's nothing that we are certain about in this world, except that everything changes. This too, is going to change. The question is only *how* it's going to change and *when* it's going to change.

And if you're not prepared, and if you don't even see that it is coming, then you will not be able to make use of that opportunity. But if you are alert to what is going on, if you are willing to try when there is an opportunity, and if you're well organized. And if you have prepared the international community to act the way you want them to act, once this opportunity arises, then big changes can take place. Whether it's autonomy, or independence or anything else—that will depend on the circumstances. But big change can take place.

The 10. question was already answered with this. What could be the impact of such experiences for the Tibetan People or specially for the Central Tibetan Administration, the CTA?

So now all of you can ask questions to Michael.

audience

I have a question for you, Dr. van Walt. Looking at the international institutions and also looking at the many challenges that China is facing, especially economic ones. Do you see any opportunity for the occupied territories?

Michael

Yes, I see many opportunities. It's impossible to predict what happens but yes, there's many possible scenarios both for Tibet and for Eastern Turkistan. I use Eastern Turkistan, because I already anticipate how people are going to react when we say Tibet in future. And they say "Why are you using Tibet?" It's Xizang. And so yes, Eastern Turkistan is the name that was used most frequently historically, for the region, not for a political entity, but for the region. It was called Eastern Turkistan. Some called it Chinese Turkistan - wrongly because it was not part of China, I'm afraid. Some called it Uyghurstan at one point, but most of the time, it has simply had the name of the ruling system. So it was Chaghatai. or it was Yarkhand or it was some other name. But Eastern Turkistan or East Turkestan is the most common and is what the people of East Turkestan call it. And so I think it is correct, although China, the colonial power, doesn't like it.

But yes, I think for both there are opportunities. What opportunities they're going to be, we don't know. And we have to be open to see what they might be. It can be a fall of Xi Jinping. If he continues certain of his policies that are displeasing many of the people around him. It could be an economic crisis. China's not in good shape economically. But sadly, our countries, the United States and the West are propping up China. They know that the economy is going badly. And we don't want the economy in China to go badly, because we think we're dependent on them. And this is even worse:

I have asked the question to some former US government officials, what would happen if there would be some major change in China in terms of uprisings or the fall of Xi Jinping or something. And the response that we get is that most likely, our governments would want to maintain Xi, or at least the

communist party in power in China. Because that is something we understand and we know. And because we're afraid of instability and afraid of change. Who will come instead? What will be their policies? We're afraid that maybe China will break up: What will that mean? We always think that small states are not as stable as big ones. Although practice shows exactly the opposite. Big states are very difficult to govern, small states are much, much more stable, much more easy to govern. But this is one of the realities.

So we don't know how our governments will react. But this is something we need to work on. We need to show why Tibet can bring stability and not instability. Why it is preferable for Tibetans to rule themselves. But yes, there are opportunities. There could be if China is reckless enough to attack Taiwan, that will have consequences for how the world views China. More than that, even if China attacks India — and a number of people in India that I speak to say: it's not a question of whether it's a question of when. Once they attack India, India's interests are going to be aligned with the Tibetan interests. And India may want to recreate a buffer state. And I think that we need to realize that there are these opportunities. And to prepare for them instead of only, you know, focusing on human rights. Human rights helps us keep Tibet on the agenda. But we need to be working politically as well.

audience

You explained historically the relationship between China and Tibet and you have also proven it that Tibet was never a part of China. Also Dr. Lau gave a very strong statement about that. But we have seen that US presidents like Obama went to China, and he said clearly that Tibet is a part of China. So that shows today's politics.

Michael

So that is what needs to change. And it's not just a question that we don't like that people say that. It fundamentally changes the way that governments can respond to changes in China. If they believe and if they have a formal policy that is that Tibet part of China, then they must consider the conflict between the Tibetans and the Chinese government as an internal affair of China. They cannot interfere. If they consider Tibet not to be a part of China, but having been aggressed and an occupied country, then it is the international community's responsibility to do something about it. So it's very important that that changes.

Now, why are governments or many governments behaving as if Tibet is part of China or even stating it? In the first place, because Chinese propaganda has been very effective in creating a perception among people—and I think even some Tibetans that I have spoken to that are very well educated — that maybe there is some truth to what China says. They think that maybe Tibet was part of China at some point, yes, they don't quite agree that it should be part of China today, but there may be some historical justification. And that is because we have been conditioned to think that way.

We have ~~been~~ already for a couple of centuries, particularly in Europe, created this notion that there has been a Chinese state, 'China', that has existed for 1000s of years. This is fantasy. It is a fantasy that existed more in Europe than even in China itself. That perception certainly didn't exist in the countries around what we call China, because they knew the situation. It didn't exist among Russians, because they knew Asia well. It was a fiction we helped create. And the PRC, or the Republic of China and the PRC, have used this fiction to their benefit. But also what they've done is what many countries have done: they have created a national history. This is something that happened a lot in the 19th

century and early 20th century. You have created your new state, in the case of China it was the Republic of China. And you create a history that shows that you have a long ancestry that you've always existed and that somehow explains your legitimacy.

In the case of the Republic of China, and then later the PRC, they did that also to prove that the territories that were actually *not* Chinese—like Mongolia, Tibet, Eastern Turkistan, Manchuria—had also always been, or at least for a long time, part of China. So that is one of the reasons I think why many people in the West think that way, think that China probably is right, to some degree. We even talk for example, about the Sino-Japanese war. In the end of the 19th century, the beginning of the 20th century, the first and second Sino-Japanese war. Nobody calls it that except Westerners. The Japanese call it the Manchu-Japanese war, or the Japanese-Qing war. The Koreans call it something different, but nobody calls it the Chinese-Japanese war because China did not exist at that time. It was a Manchu empire that had conquered China, that had relations with the Tibetans, that had sovereignty over various Mongol nations. But it was not China. Same with the Yuan Dynasty. The Yuan Dynasty was a Mongol empire that ruled 'China'.

China says today two very bizarre things, most recently especially: They say the Yuan Dynasty started in 1206. That is when Chinggis Khan started the Mongol Empire. And so now, Chinggis Khan is called the "great son of China." You try to tell Mongolians that in Mongolia today. If you go to the Mongolian parliament today, in Mongolia, there are three enormous statues in front of the parliament: in the middle, Chinggis Khan, on the right Khubilai Khan, on the left the other brother, who ruled the western part of the Empire. I mean, this was a *Mongol* Empire and the fact that Khubilai Khan ruled 'China', among other areas, did not make it Chinese! The same with the Manchus: their 'Qing' empire was Manchu, not Chinese. And this is the fundamental thing that is very difficult to read and to understand. These were Inner Asian empires that conquered China, just like the Spanish conquered the Netherlands. It didn't mean that Spain became part of the Netherlands. It meant that the Netherlands became part of Spain at the time. The British conquered India. India was as you know, the "jewel in the crown" of the British Empire. In other words, its biggest territory, its most wealthy territory, its most economically beneficial area, biggest population was India. When the Mongols conquered China, in the eastern part of the empire, China was the biggest conquest, the economically most profitable area, most populous area. When the Manchus conquered China, *that* was the "jewel in the crown" of the Manchu empire. It was very important part of the Manchu Empire, which is why they established the capital there. But Britain didn't become part of India. The British Empire was not the Indian empire. And it's exactly the same. The Manchu empire did not become Chinese, or 'China'.

But somehow in our minds, it's difficult to make that comparison. But it's exactly the same. In other words, yes, there were important parts of those empires, but it didn't turn them into Chinese Empires. And the other argument Chinese often use and scholars also, Western scholars, and I think we have to be careful about that, is they say yes, but Manchus became 'acculturated' and assimilated with the Chinese. They started using Chinese culture. They started dressing more like Chinese, they started using Chinese administration techniques, etc. So let me explain: Firstly, they used Chinese administration techniques right from the start. They even used a dynastic name right from the start. Because that was the way to rule the Chinese. But don't forget the Manchu had all these military garrisons in all the big cities in 'China'. And they weren't Chinese that were in those garrisons. They were Manchus and Mongols. In other words, the Chinese were being ruled by a foreign power. And yes, they used the local administrative system to make that occupation work properly. And acculturation, so what? Yes, near the last 100 years perhaps of a 300 years Empire, more and more

people enjoyed Chinese opera and spoke good Chinese and read Chinese literature as well as Manchu. But that doesn't change the nature of the occupation. You know, the fact that almost all the all the royal families in Europe spoke French didn't make them French. The Russian Czar had French culture, but that didn't make him French or make Russia France. So you see, that that's simply not an argument.

audience

His name is Bill Hayton and he wrote a book "The invention of China", where he demonstrated that even the term "China" has been invented by foreigners by Westerners.

Michael

He wrote that book after going to a seminar that we organized. Right where he met a wonderful Turkish scholar who had worked on that very much. And they got together and worked on this. Bill Hayton has written two very good books, one on the South Chinese Sea conflict, and the second one called "The invention of China". It's well worth reading. Yes, thank you for mentioning that.

Audience

Nowadays, we are very much confused on the economics and business affairs with China. We from the Western countries. As long as we do not change that situation, we give Xi Jinping the feeling of being the most important leader of the world. So my intention is, or the question, shouldn't we make much more pressure on our own governments, that they change the affairs with China, so that we can indirectly, help the Tibetan people. So our work should be to make pressure on our governments and to work in our countries, and not to help directly to Tibetan people. What is almost impossible. You did so much work, your life consists of on this event or on this work, and we should make more pressure on our countries.

Michael

Now we have to pressure our governments. And I think we have to explain to them as well, I mean, not everybody is educated on this subject matter. In terms of economic dependence, and so on, I think there is a slightly more realistic perception today about China and the dangers of being dependent on China, because of the war in Ukraine, and how we see that being dependent on Russia was a very dangerous thing. I think there's more understanding of that, and we need to use that, we need to not let politicians forget that. To disengage more with China doesn't mean not having economic relations, but not become dependent on them. That's one thing.

On Tibet, what I'm telling governments and asking these governments to do, is two things. One is to abide by international law and not recognize that Tibet is part of China. In other words, to adopt a non-recognition policy, whether they do it publicly, or they do it just as an internal decision. I don't care. They don't need to make a public statement about it. As long as they don't state anything that harms Tibet's status. And as long as they don't do anything that implies that they recognize the Tibet as part of China. This should be a change of policy now. Now, there are some governments that understand this, and that are going to do that. There are others that think, especially the bigger countries, that "Oh, my God, this is terrible. We can talk about human rights, but not about the political issue." But I think that over time, things will change. In the US, as you know, there's already legislation that is trying to push for such a change in policy. There's other parliamentarians in Europe that are also trying to push that.

There are other ways that governments can indicate a certain legitimacy of the Tibetan government in exile and treat it as a subject of international law. In other words, they don't necessarily already need to recognize the Tibetan government in exile. That's a big thing to do. But, as a first step, treating Tibetans as a subject of international law, which they are undeniably, is a very important start.

Tibet, Taiwan, even Hong Kong, they are subjects of international law because they act as independent entities. They've had treaties, they have economic relations, etc. That can be helpful. So for example, in one country recently Sikyong was received by the foreign ministry with motorcycle escort, taking him to the Foreign Ministry. That is a public showing of some kind of recognition. So there are ways in which governments can, without having to make public statements of a change of policy indicate that they are changing their policy.

And so this is what we're trying to ask governments to do, as a first step: (1) do not do anything that hurts Tibetans. In other words, don't say Tibet is a part of China. Also, because all our governments have a policy that they want to support a negotiated resolution to the Tibetan conflict, the Tibet-China conflict, or at least a peaceful resolution of it. The only incentive, the leadership of the PRC has or the Communist Party has to dialogue or to have negotiations with Tibetans, the only incentive is to gain legitimacy for their rule of Tibet. Tibetans have made a proposal for genuine autonomy, as a way to resolve the conflict. China has rejected it, has not accepted it. So that means the Tibetans haven't given up anything. They haven't given up independence, haven't given up their right to self-determination. They simply have made a proposal. If the Chinese had accepted it, and said, Okay, we agree, then, of course, there has to be a quid pro quo. And the quid pro quo would have been that the Tibetans would have said, we accept to remain within the PRC, but we have this strong autonomy, we decide on everything except foreign affairs and defense. Because that's essentially what that proposal is about. But as long as China doesn't accept it, nothing is given up. But if *our* countries, *our* governments are saying Tibet is part of China, then they're taking away all the leverage Tibetans have to negotiate. They will have nothing more to give the Chinese in exchange for getting something meaningful, if we are already giving some form of legitimacy to the Chinese in Tibet. So I think this, our governments understand, if you explain it this way. And if they say "But we've already recognized so long ago that Tibet was part of China" you point out that was a mistake. There's ways to correct it, and governments can do it slowly, without any shame. So I think things can change.

audience

In the Tibetan Community there is the discussion about Rangzen and Umelang. Rangzen demanding the full independence of Tibet and Umelang searching the middle way and compromising with China probably leading to the autonomous region. Wouldn't accepting Tibet being an autonomous region of China contradict the fact that Tibet was never part of China?

Michael

No, it doesn't necessarily need to have anything to do with the historical status. Now, it is possible that China would want as part of that, that you agree that Tibet has always been a part of China. And in fact, I think it's very likely, but because even in 17 Point agreement, there is some reference to Tibet, "rejoining the great motherland". So that is possible. But I think there's a misunderstanding there, among many people, including many Tibetans: There is no contradiction between the right to self-determination, independence and autonomy. In other words, these are not choices to be made, "either or." The right to self-determination, as I said earlier, is simply the right to decide for yourself. So Tibetan

people have the right to decide what status they want, it can be independence, it can be autonomy, it can be complete integration, and becoming Chinese, it can be becoming Indian doesn't matter. In other words, it's just the right to choose. So if you say we have the right to self-determination, you are simply saying we have a right to choose, it is not for China to choose it, it's not for the US to choose it, or for Switzerland to choose it. It is "our Tibetan people's right". So that's not contradictory with the Middle Way approach, it's not contradictory with a claim to Rangzen.

Personally, I don't think that with the present regime of Xi Jinping, there is much chance of genuine negotiations to try to resolve this conflict. I think Xi Jinping is bent on more control for the center and for the Communist Party, not less. His behavior in Hong Kong is very clear. It takes away autonomy, it doesn't allow autonomy. So I don't really think that there's much point in thinking that could be useful negotiations with Xi Jinping at this time. But everything changes and Xi Jinping is not going to live forever. And so there may be a moment when negotiations will be useful with the PRC, but there may also be other ways of resolving the conflict.

But China has always had the strategy in negotiations of demanding that the other side first accept a fundamental principle. Once they accept that principle, then all negotiations have to be within that principle and in accordance with it. So China did that with Hong Kong. It does it with every major political negotiation, it does it with Tibet as well. "First, you accept that Tibet has been a part of China, then we can negotiate." So then when you negotiate, they say: "well, if you're a part of China, then why would we treat you differently than we do all other Chinese citizens? Why are you asking for something special? You're just begging us for something just because you're Tibetan? Why should you have the right to determine and make decisions on the environment or climate change? If we give you this, people in Shanghai are going to ask the same thing. People in Xinjiang are going to ask the same thing," and so on.

So it is fundamental that we reestablish so clearly that Tibet was not and is not a part of China, and that *it must be from that basis* that you negotiate with China. Then you can make compromises because you have something to give them in return. Once you've accepted that you are part of China, I don't think there's much to negotiate.

audience

The right to self-determination, that doesn't expire in a way right? How is it if once revoked, or once given away this right, like accepting being a part of China? Can you always go back from an international perspective?

Michael

It's a very good question. And it's not simple. And not everybody agrees on the answer to that question. So there is not a simple black and white answer, if you like. Yes, as long as you don't accept that you're part of China, you maintain the right to self-determination for a number of reasons.

One, because you're occupied, but two, very importantly, because Tibetans are undeniably a people under alien subjugation, domination and exploitation. And that's the definition also of colonialism. So as a people under alien domination, you have the right to self-determination. Same is true of the Uyghurs. They are a people under alien domination, and there's no disputing that. There's no need to argue about that. That is the case.

What China doesn't like is being called a colonial power, but they are a colonial power. It's just the modern form of colonialism. And so on that basis, you have the right to self-determination, but also on the basis that you're an occupied country.

Then of course, you have the right to reestablish your independence or to decide a different status. But yes, if you have accepted you are *already* a part of China, then the question becomes different. If at some point, your people are being treated so badly, consistently, oppressed so badly, consistently, then there is this notion in international law, that you have a right to self-determination. So Tibetans also have that as an additional and different reason.

And the Tibetans' right to self-determination was recognized by the UN in 1961, as well, and that needs to be used: the resolution of the General Assembly that says Tibetans have the right to self-determination. Now it's time to exercise it. In other words, you don't need to prove that you have it again, you simply need to say we now want it to be exercised, and governments have the obligation to help you exercise it. Or not to do anything that harms your ability to exercise the right to self-determination. And also, this is interesting for some, I think, for advocacy purposes. There's also this right to the resources of your territory. Only Tibetans have the right to the natural resources of the Tibetan land, and other resources. And so China cannot exploit those resources and our governments and our corporations cannot benefit from the resources of Tibet without consent of the Tibetan people. That could mean for example, without the CTA approving. Today no corporation goes to Dharamsala and asks the CTA, "can we buy these products that originate from Tibet?" But we should make them do that. Because otherwise again they're violating international law and our governments are violating international law by allowing companies from our countries to exploit or benefit from Tibetan resources without seeking permission first from the Tibetan people or the Tibetan government in exile.

Audience:

In one answer, you mentioned that we have to be prepared in case the window of opportunity, is opening. How would you judge our preparedness, the preparedness of the Tibet support movement and the preparedness of the Tibetan community, of the Tibetan CTA?

Michael

I don't know. Not sufficient. I mean, if you see the internal divisions within the Tibetan community nowadays, within the parliament which is dysfunctional. The Tibetan Parliament can't make any decisions anymore. That's not being prepared. If you pay all that attention to how the problem is within the community, rather than spend time on the major issue of freeing Tibet, I think there's a real problem. The Tibetan community in exile used to be the example of one of the only exile communities that was united, that was under clear leadership, that knew what it wanted, etc. That has changed. And it's not to blame anybody for it, this happens. I mean, this is part of a long period of exile. That makes it much more difficult. And now the diaspora is spread. And you're subject to the same manipulation as other democratic societies are today, through social media and other things, it becomes very easy to create divisions. And I'm sure China is exploiting every possibility to create divisions. And they're succeeding. And I'm not suggesting it's only China doing it, but it's exploiting those divisions. And so I think Tibetans have to be very aware of that, and not let themselves be manipulated. But I think the movement has a responsibility there as well. To stay focused, not to get involved in internal politics, if you don't have to. I think that is a handicap now. And I think it will harm the ability even to become aware of opportunities when they come. Because if you're looking at your navel, you're not looking

ahead. You have to imagine what you want for Tibet. And keep that, in your mind, visualize that in your mind all the time. And then you see the opportunities arising to achieve that. If that's not what you're focusing on, then you don't see it coming.

Audience:

We quite often hear we have to push our own government to actually be active. But if you actually assess how the UNO is ruled and how they actually decide and how they are actually doing their business, then it's going to be very difficult to even with pushes within the countries to move on the entire world scene. But if I go a step further, the question is also, what is the real situation? The real situation is China is very strong in terms of economy, and also in terms of the power. But at the same time, within China, there are many billionaires, many rich people, and I believe that's going to be sooner or later a problem within the country in China. And how would you see that after your analysis? How would you see this situation in China? And also in the framework of the UN? I mean, you can push Switzerland or Germany, or France and Belgium. But the UNO as such doesn't move because China knows how to deal with the warts and assistant they need. How would you see the situation in the near future?

Michael

China is powerful and strong. It's true, but it also has its weaknesses. And you just mentioned it. Internally, there are also difficulties and weaknesses. So China's strength is not permanent or given. But small countries, especially if they work together can achieve quite a bit. China has been very good at getting the support of a large number of countries in Africa, in Latin America, and so forth. So there's work there to be done. And I think many of those countries would understand the colonial argument better than some others. But the United Nations is not an entity on its own. It does what the government's want it to do, and China is powerful in the United Nations. But don't forget that India is the most important country for Tibetans and Tibet, and India understands the situation probably better than anybody else. And it has a self-interest. So it's always important to find the interest, the self-interest of the country that you're talking to. And just in general, I think the West has a very big interest in China not destroying the world order, the way it was created after the Second World War. Because we're all dependent on that, for some peace, and for the way we relate to each other. And the UN is a result of that. And all the financial institutions are a result of that world order. So much is dependent on respecting our world order and international law. And China is trying to change it to suit its own benefit. So if our countries don't uphold the rule of law, international rule of law, then they themselves are undermining their own security. And behaving the way they do in relation to Tibet is one way of eroding the rule of law. But there's others as well, they have to stand firm on freedom of international navigation in the South China Sea, they have to stand firm on Taiwan's rights, etc. But those are things that are part of the interests of the West. And so that needs also to be raised, and the connection needs to be shown to Tibet. In India, it's much easier. It's a security interest. And in Southeast Asia and India and Bangladesh and Pakistan, and China, it is the river water that come from Tibet that can be a crucial factor, because people need it for livelihood. And if China is going to divert river water—which it has said it is going to do—into China instead of it going down to India and to Bangladesh and to Southeast Asia, then people really have an interest in a different government and different policies in Tibet.

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thank you so much for everything

Michael

I accept it as jointly for me and Mike Boltjes, both,-because we're co-authors of this book. I'm not the only one who's been working on this. Thank you so much.