

Lies that Cannot be Covered by Glaciers

BY CHEN WEIJIAN

This essay, by a Chinese journalist now based in New Zealand, was virtually the only original commentary posted on overseas dissident ChineseWeb sites.

Recently, soldiers from China's People's Liberation Army opened fire on a group of Tibetans, including children, who were crossing the glacial Nangpa Pass in an attempt to join the Tibetan government in exile in India. Two people were reported killed. This atrocity was witnessed by more than 60 international mountaineers who were nearby at the time. The mountaineers saw kneeling Chinese soldiers slowly and calmly shoot repeatedly at shabbily dressed Tibetan men, women and children, who were fleeing in all directions. Around 10 terrified children were rounded up like mice caught by a cat. The mountaineers could not believe that the country that will host the 2008 Olympic Games could so barbarously kill its own citizens. This incident was immediately reported by the international media and shocked the world, as international law has long clearly stipulated that "border patrols can use arms only as a last resort when their lives are threatened," and these Tibetan fugitives were unarmed and completely defenseless.

According to statistics from the Tibetan government in exile, each year more than 2,500 Tibetans cross the glaciers to pass through Nepal into Dharamsala, India, where the government in exile is based. Many refugees die during the crossing. Their frozen bodies are often seen along the escape routes, which inevitably pass through dangerous terrain as the refugees avoid contact with Chinese border patrols. The Tibetan fugitives must then pass through an area that they have named "Death Valley," where a single loosened stone can cause a thunderous avalanche. Many Tibetans have been buried under these falling rocks.

Even if the fugitives are fortunate enough to avoid an avalanche and enter Nepal, their freedom is still far off. Threatened by the Chinese government, the Nepalese government has set up checkpoints along the Tibetan escape routes, and many Tibetans, after escaping the talons of the Chinese Communist Party, have been arrested by Nepalese border police and detained in prison camps, after which they are sent back to Tibet. Every fugitive Tibetan is punished by the Chinese authorities upon his or her return.

I have visited Dharamsala and interviewed many Tibetan exiles there. Many of them showed me fingers and toes missing or maimed by frostbite and recalled their fugitive experience as a nightmare. When I asked them why they fled Tibet to India at such great risk, they all told me with a smile that it was to see the Dalai Lama, to be free and to learn of their own culture.

Although the Tibetan government in exile is not wealthy, and pays its officials a monthly salary of only \$100, it manages to provide adequately for the basic needs of Tibetan refugees. This is particularly true in the area of education,

with every child, whether born in exile or arriving as a fugitive from Tibet, receiving compulsory primary and secondary education. Not only is there no tuition to pay, but all of the children's living expenses are covered by the government at an average cost of about 2,000 rupees a month (about \$44) for each student. The government also provides each student with 100 rupees a month for incidental expenses. In comparison, teachers' salaries are only 3,000-4,000 rupees a month (about \$66-\$88), and many teachers, particularly foreigners, are volunteers.

The exiled Tibetan community has not implemented a completely free healthcare system, but its Public Health Ministry requires that people above the age of 65 and all new exiles receive free medical treatment, while monks and students pay half. The free education and virtually free healthcare are a great attraction, but freedom and a life free of fear are clearly the most important reasons for Tibetans fleeing to Dharamsala.

In recent years the CCP has dishonestly claimed that human rights conditions in Tibet have greatly improved, that the lives of the Tibetan people have become prosperous and that Tibetans can freely practice their own religion, learn their own culture and enjoy their traditional lifestyle. The CCP has also claimed that those who flee to exile in India have been deceived by the Dalai Lama and his cohorts, that many discover conditions far worse than back home, and that after seeing the corruption in the exile administration, they return to Tibet. But digital information sources are difficult to block, and Tibetan refugees are in no way deceived about the conditions in India and the integrity of the government in exile. Every Tibetan who has fled to India can tell friends and relatives back home about the actual conditions. That is why, over the decades, the footprints of fugitives have never disappeared from the icebergs and snowfields between Tibet and Dharamsala. Regardless of how many fall on their way, Tibetan refugees continue to advance, wave upon wave, toward Dharamsala. Every drop of blood left on the ice and snow denounces the Communist Party's tyranny and exposes its lies.

This is not the first time the CCP has fired upon Tibetan fugitives, and it will certainly not be the last. In decades past, East German border police fired on East Germans as they tried to cross the Berlin Wall to escape Communist tyranny. Eventually, those murderous border patrols were tried for their crimes. I believe that the day will come when Chinese border guards who have killed fleeing Tibetans will likewise receive their just punishment.

Translated by Wang Ai

The original Chinese essay was first posted on the Peacehall Web site on October 13, 2006, <http://www.peacehall.com/news/gb/pubvp/2006/10/200610131705.shtml>.