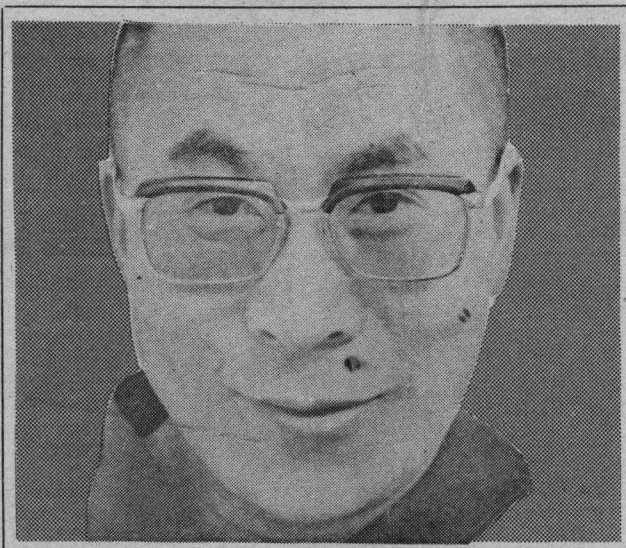


TIBET'S DALAI LAMA COMES TO SANTA CRUZ

Imagine the Pope driven out of Italy, into Exile in Germany, and you have an idea of the situation in which Tibet's Dalai Lama finds himself. The 44-year-old Buddhist leader, who has presided for two decades over 100,000 Tibetan exiles in India, is conducting a six-week tour of the States, and will be giving a free public talk on his faith at 3 pm Tuesday on the UCSC playing field. The purpose of his visit, he told a press conference, is "basically non-political, and mainly religious and cultural and what you call social." Nonetheless, there's an inescapable international political cast to the proceedings.

Tenzin Gyatso assumed leadership of Tibet 40 years ago, and later saw its dissolution by invading China, as predicted by his predecessor. Following the death of that predecessor in 1933, search parties went off looking for the new Dalai Lama, according to the custom of the land. Having received signs in a vision, three of Tibet's most important Abbots found what they were looking for in the form of a two-year-old peasant boy, Tenzin Gyatso. The child spoke in court dialect, which was unknown to the people of his area, and named all three abbots in exchange for a rosary that had belonged to his predecessor. He then successfully differentiated a number of the 13th Dalai Lama's possessions from skillfully crafted imitations. He also passed the final test, bearing the eight physical markings which are said to distinguish Dalai Lamas from all others, proving he possessed the reincarnated spirit of Bodhisattva Chenrezi.



As Chinese armed forces threaten to take over his country in the Fifties, the Dalai Lama found himself in a bind. Buddhist philosophy preaches the folly and strict avoidance of violence, whereas communism did not. The leader soon found himself in the difficult position of having to encourage his people not to resist the gradual takeover.

The final blow came on the 20th anniversary of Gyatso's rule in 1959, when a Chinese army camp requested the Dalai Lama's unprotected presence at a play, a tactic that had resulted in the death of three other high lamas and the imprisonment of one. Word got out that the Dalai Lama was about to be kidnapped, and he soon found his quarters surrounded by 30,000 shovel-and-knife-carrying Tibetans, who for two weeks stood guard over their leader. Under pressing demands from Chinese officers who aimed guns at the capital city of Lhasa, the Dalai Lama chose to remove himself as the object of contention, slipping out disguised as a guard in an effort to stave off the confrontation. He reached India two weeks later, followed by 100,000 Tibetans over the course of the next six months. Those who stayed behind faced a purge in which 87,000 Tibetans were killed, later described by the International Commission of Jurists as attempted genocide.

A Tibetan Government in Exile, with approximately 100,000 Tibetans and the Dalai Lama as their leader and representative, was then set up in Dharamsala, Northern India. It is from there that the Dalai Lama now reigns, and continues to argue that Tibetans have been denied the right to self-determination.

But as leader of all sects of Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai Lama's reach extends beyond Dharamsala to exiled Tibetans throughout India, and also in Europe, Canada, the U.S., and Taiwan. It also includes non-Tibetan recruits to the religion, whose ranks have surged following the interest in Eastern religions developed in the late Sixties. Buddhism was brought back to the states by soul-searching backpackers like poet Gary Snyder, while cohort Alan Ginsberg is a regular visitor at Boulder, Colorado's center of Buddhist study, the Naropa Institute.

Santa Cruz has its own trio of Buddhist study centers, including the Vajrapani Institute, which along with UCSC is co-sponsoring the Dalai Lama's visit. "Buddhism is coming to hold a vital interest to many people in the West," claims the Institute, "even as it slowly dies in Asia with the encroachment of the materialist philosophy of communism." I asked Vajrapani Associate Director Francesca Hampton why the materialist philosophy of capitalism would not be equally destructive to the spread of Buddhism.

"We (capitalists) have been trying materialism out longer," said Hampton, who describes herself as a one-time leftist, materialist agnostic. "And we've found that material things don't make us happy. We may get pleasure from them, but we are ultimately dissatisfied."

Buddhist philosophy argues that the world which meets our senses is an illusion, that all is part of one life force. "Buddhists have been working on the mind the way Boeing works on airplanes," said Hampton, "and the Buddhists have been doing it for thousands of years."

The Vajrapani Institute is planning to build a Buddhist retreat, and one day hopes to start a small Buddhist college in the Santa Cruz area. They can be contacted by calling 426-1784 or writing PO Box 82, Boulder Creek, 95006. There are also two other Buddhist Study centers in Santa Cruz, the Karma Thegsum Choling center, studying the Kagyu tradition at 323 Monterey St., and the Dharmadhatu center at 821 California St. •

Jess Grant with M.H.