

more strongly into its orbit, with Chinese influence mattering less than before (Niquet 2001: 7).

The years since 1990 have been very good ones in China's relations with its neighbours. In 1991, it 'normalised' its relations with Vietnam after a period of extreme bitterness and in December 1999 the two countries signed two agreements settling their mutual borders. Although some issues of division remained, Chinese influence in Vietnam as well as trade and investment increased dramatically. Chinese visited Vietnam to an unprecedented extent, and China became Vietnam's principal source of international tourism.

China has also enjoyed very good relations with its neighbour Myanmar, rather too good for Western human rights activists, who regarded Myanmar with disgust and horror, especially before the release of democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi in May 2002. Several events of the early 1990s caused China to shift its 'Western Asian focus... from the Middle East to Central Asia' (Harris 1993: 126). These included the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War of 1991, which pitted the United Nations against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. China's relations with the countries of Central Asia have been generally both good and improving since that time.

China's relationship with the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) improved greatly during the 1980s, along with that with the Soviet Union. However, the MPR fell at about the same time as the Soviet Union, and the Constitution of 12 February 1992 changed the name of the state from MPR simply to Mongolia. It has tried to maintain good relations both with Russia and China, while at the same time reducing dependence on them. In October 1994, Russia, China and Mongolia signed a protocol defining their mutual borders. To the dismay of both Russia and China, Mongolia has accepted military relations with various countries, including the United States.

To the east of Mongolia is Korea, which was divided in 1945 into the northern Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or North Korea, and the southern Republic of Korea, or South Korea. During the Korean War (1950-1953), China fought in defence of North Korea, which was then, and is still, ruled by a Marxist-Leninist party called the Korean Workers' Party. Ever since the Korean War, China has enjoyed good relations, on a reasonably stable basis, with North Korea. During the 1980s, Chinese relations with South Korea began to thaw, and a PRC team took part in the Olympic Games held in Seoul in the autumn of 1988. In August 1992, South Korea established diplomatic relations with China. North Korea was definitely displeased by the Chinese action, but chose not to highlight it by making its opposition too clear. Since that time relations between China and South Korea have developed quite well, especially in the trade area.

After a very long period of hostility, relations with India continued a tendency to improve even though, as one writer has it, 'India principally represents to China a budding regional rival' (Roy 1998: 170). Visits at prime ministerial level resumed after a very long break. In September 1993 Indian Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao's visit to China included the signing of documents concerning the maintenance of border peace, the reduction of troops along the border and expanded border trade. In May 1998, Defence Minister George Fernandes of the

newly formed right-wing nationalist government of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) declared China, not Pakistan, as the greatest potential threat to India. Later the same month Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee cited the Chinese threat as a primary reason for five nuclear tests. Relations appeared set for decline. However, since that time, both countries appear to have decided that 'at least a modicum of warmth' is essential for their own security and that of their regions.<sup>3</sup>

## Tibet and the Tibetans

In Chapter 2, I noted that Tibet was already an issue leading to a decline in Sino-American relations by the late 1980s. Since the early 1990s this trend has intensified, Tibet becoming one of those issues of concern to popular opinion in Western countries, especially the United States. Hand in hand with the religious influence of Tibetan Buddhism, noted above, has come the political influence of the 'Tibet lobby', which tends to support independence for Tibet and is solidly critical of more or less everything China does in Tibet. American sympathy for the Dalai Lama and his supporters is virtually synonymous with opposition to China. It is hardly surprising that this has brought about a sharp response in Beijing and contributed to a downturn in Sino-American relations.

At the same time, neither the United States nor other countries have allowed the Tibet issue seriously to threaten their overall relationships. The general pattern in China's foreign relations concerning Tibet has been that, in response to public opinion and lobbies pushing the Tibet cause, the United States and other countries have condemned China for its policy and human rights abuses in Tibet. Some members of the American Congress and the parliaments of other countries have demanded further diplomatic action against China. However, executive governments have stopped short of taking diplomatic measures with the potential to inflict serious damage on commercial dealings with China. And as for a major country actually recognising the Tibetan government-in-exile, that has never come into serious question.

The Tibet issue may matter, but in the overall scheme of things, it does not rank at or near the top of the priorities affecting bilateral relations with China. For example, the United States has numerous other issues overshadowing Tibet in relating to China. These include a range of strategic issues, such as Taiwan and Korea, and economic relations. Unless the bilateral relationship were to deteriorate drastically due to other factors, it is quite out of the question that the United States would again provide military support on behalf of Tibetan independence, as it did from the mid-1950s to 1974, let alone send in troops.

Right at the beginning of a major 1994 report on Tibet, the American State Department declared unequivocally that it recognised Tibet as part of China. It stated that it did not conduct diplomatic relations with the 'self-styled "Tibetan government-in-exile"' (State Department 1995: 1), the terminology implying a suspicious, even mildly hostile, attitude. On 20 October 1999, Reuters reported a spokesman for British Prime Minister Tony Blair as saying that Britain recognises Chinese sovereignty over Tibet and that the PRC leaders were well aware of this (quoted Sautman 2000: 37). As far as concerns diplomatic relations, the