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mailto: claude.levenson@gmail.com

THE FAROE ISLANDS AT UNESCO; TIBET CAN STILL WAIT

Not so long ago, the little Parisian world of UNESCO was bubbling with effervescence, waiting to hear who would be elected head of the international organization. There were rumours, endless talk and laborious negotiations; the new head is woman, Irinia Bokova from Bulgaria, who finally beat Farouk Hosny, the Egyptian candidate. At about the same time, lovers of football, much more numerous, got very excited about a decisive match between the French and the Faroe Islands teams.

At first sight, there is not much in common between these two events. And yet... the hubbub around the first and the clamour around the second relegated to the background a third event that was heavy with significance. Happily, unlike the surprising silence of most journalists, a serious newspaper that loses no occasion to reveal a scoop did not fail to announce to its vast public this very important news; as from mid October, those concerned have been informed that the Faroe Islands have been admitted as the 200th member of UNESCO, "which now consists of 193 Member States and seven associates". Thanks are due to the French service of Radio Beijing, who made this clear: "According to the Constitutional Act of UNESCO, territories or groups of territories that do not themselves assume responsibility for the conduct of their foreign relations can be admitted as associate members by the General Conference".

A wise stipulation, that enabled the European archipelago of 18 islands and 40,000 inhabitants to join with other associates that preceded it, that is to say, Aruba, the Dutch Antilles, the Caïman Islands, the Virgin Islands, Tokelau (in the Pacific, three islets and 1,187 inhabitants) and...Macao. What is interesting about the Chinese news service is that not only does it give information, essential to the enrichment of the world cultural patrimony of humanity, but is at the same time stimulating, because it can give ideas and suggest initiatives, happy and innovative.

If members of UNO have every right to be members of UNESCO, there is nothing more to say; and if this institution specialized in education and science includes a half-dozen more countries, considering the cultural diversity of our brave little blue planet, this is nothing more than normal; does not the august institution have a mandate to "contribute to the maintenance of peace and security in the world by increasing collaboration between nations, through education, science, culture and communication, in order to ensure the

universal respect of justice, law, human rights and fundamental liberty for everyone, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, which the Chart of the United Nations recognizes for all people?”

It is therefore quite natural to find St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Martin, St. Vincent and Grenada, the Marshall Islands and the Solomon Islands, or again Kiribati, Nauru, Tuvalu and Tonga, ready to welcome their new associate, the Faroe Islands “known for the integrity of the landscape, traditional architecture and a marked cultural identity.” Marked cultural identity...territories that do not themselves assume the responsibility of their foreign relations...” does that remind you of anything? OK, Macao certainly has its place.

But, why not Tibet? No doubt that is because of an unfortunate omission, which the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs (this Ministry usually submits a request for association with UNESCO, in the name of the country it controls) will soon happily put right. It is common knowledge – to use a formula dear to the heart of the Beijing spokespersons – that the Land of the Snow-Capped Mountains which, as everyone knows, or pretends to know, “belongs to China since the beginning of time”, has the advantage without ambiguity of “a marked cultural identity”, with its traditional architecture, and its landscapes long ago integrated with a powerful beauty, to speak only of its prominent characteristics. Its past, its ancestral knowledge, its artistic treasures, its language and its alphabet, its customs and costumes, and what remains of its patrimony, amply qualify this vast territory that one calls ‘The Roof of the World’ to enter UNESCO by the front door, just as much as Macao.

An idea of this kind was put forward about a year ago, aiming to enrol Tibet in the world patrimony, in view of bringing a “brilliant and pacific reply to the problem posed by the statute of this country”. It would not be possible to find a more praiseworthy intention, but who listened to it at a time when economics prevailed over all political situations, and the respect of principles, even at UNO and UNESCO, to which all the members of these honourable institutions subscribe? For want of a gesture of real political courage, UNESCO which claims cultural universality would be proud of such audacity...

An Imposing Shadow Between New Delhi and Beijing

However, beyond what can appear to be an anecdote, the *realpolitik* that is more and more fashionable throughout the world leaves room to think. As if Tibet was only a simple alibi, or a cosmetic measure designed to distract attention from the real problem, according to the interests of the moment –

whether one is called Barack Obama or Nicolas Sarkozy, without forgetting Manmohan Singh, or even Sonia Gandhi. Between the two Asian mastodons, who continually give way to more or less concealed skirmishes, ineffectively hiding a growing rivalry, Tibet is no longer the buffer state of years gone by, but a huge shadow over the relationship between New Delhi and Beijing. And this relationship is no longer looking rosy; even the press is rather discreet at the moment. More than the sound of boots, it is the movement of tanks and the deaf-making racket of the rapid construction of military infrastructures on the roof of the world that can be heard far away, whilst the Indian government are apparently perfectly serene...at the same time suspending frontier building sites as long as the Chinese authorities manifest their bad temper.

Nevertheless, it is not sufficient to let the Dalai Lama reply to the requests of the faithful in Arunachal Pradesh and, moreover, to believe that India does not need to care about the intentions of its new neighbour beyond the Himalayas – the intentions of the latter are not above suspicion. Tibet and the Tibetans have already had, and will again have a bitter experience; certain strategists or high-ranking officials in India have not forgotten the experience of 1962 and have no desire for it to be renewed. Certainly, no-one would wish this, with the exception of those who would like to light the touch-paper, and history teaches us that intoxicated by pride and power, they let themselves become intoxicated more often than they should by this pernicious illusion to the point of ignoring the consequences.

Taking up the familiar refrain of the decline of Western influence in the world and the role of democracy, American in particular, in the opposite way, Wei Jingsheng, a veteran of Chinese dissidence, recently recalled on the anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall: - “We some Chinese, we were discouraged after the massacre of 4 June in Tiananmen. This victory of Eastern Europeans had the effect of a campfire in the dark; it encouraged us and gave us hope.”

Certainly, the times move only slowly, and even if the horizon is dark and the sky low, the last word always comes back to the light. “Humanity is crying for help”, observed the Dalai Lama a long time ago. Our era is desperate. If there are people willing to help, they should present themselves. It is time...” In a past time, even further away, another wise person assured us: - “When there is no more hope, that it is the right time to hope”.

C.B.L.