

# Book Reviews

EDITED BY JOHN THACKRAY

*My Tibet*. Text by His Holiness The Fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet. Photographs and Introduction by Galen Rowell. Mountain Light Press, published by the University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1990. Large Format, 162 pages, 117 color photographs. \$35.00.

Galen Rowell's inspiration for his newest book came about in an unusual way—which is hardly surprising, considering the book itself was an exceptional undertaking. As foreign mountaineers climbing in Tibet well knew, a photograph of the Dalai Lama is the most revered gift one may give to a Tibetan. Travelling in western Tibet in 1988, at a chance meeting while his Chinese hosts were watching, Rowell gave a snapshot of the Dalai Lama to a Tibetan nomad he had met the year before on a pilgrimage around Mount Kailas. Upon returning home, Rowell discovered much to his surprise that for giving away the picture of the Dalai Lama, he had been tried in absentia in Beijing and convicted of sedition—"the causing of discontent, insurrection, or resistance against a government," according to Webster's. Although he sent a letter of apology to the Chinese ambassador in Washington, DC, a week later, "something inside me snapped," describes Rowell. "I felt humiliated and ineffectual. Whatever the consequences, I vowed to free myself of the Chinese censorship of the American Press."

Not surprisingly, the germination of *My Tibet* soon followed. Rowell felt the power of the 14th Dalai Lama's presence to which the snapshot had alerted him. His Holiness's many essays on world peace and environmental responsibility link him with John Muir, whose writings have created wider understanding and environmental awareness in America.

"It came to me . . . that the Dalai Lama's words could serve the same high purpose when matched to photographs of Tibet," writes Rowell—only, in the case of Tibet, the landscape and wildlife are not the sole innocent victims whose survival is currently at stake. Tibetan culture and the Tibetan people themselves have been subjugated by the Chinese for over thirty years. On the other hand, it may come as a surprise to many who read this book to feel the compassion that the Dalai Lama has towards the Chinese communists who invaded his country in 1950, forced him into exile, and subsequently killed over a million of his people. "His Holiness is far more interested in talking about common ground than about conflict. He bears no ill will, even towards the Chinese. To dwell on the agony the Chinese have imposed on his land is to lose the essence of his being and his message to the world," writes Rowell.

*My Tibet*, then, is Rowell's exquisite photographic record of the Tibetan landscape, animals, flowers, and people, combined with the 14th Dalai Lama's

responses to these images taken in direct quotations, in addition to his expanded written views, recorded in six philosophical, religious, and historical essays titled "Compassion, World Peace, and Happiness," "Ecology and the Human Heart," "Universal Responsibility and the Environment," "Tibet as I Knew It," "My Life in Lhasa," and "The Meaning of Pilgrimage."

Several of the direct quotes—which were tape recorded at a slide show in Dharamsala, India, where Rowell first met His Holiness and showed him his photographs—illustrate the Dalai Lama's wonderful sense of humor, and portray him as a very down-to-earth, jovial human being. When Rowell's award-winning photograph, "Rainbow Over The Potala," clicked onto the screen, His Holiness remarked, "That is the hill where my cars broke down. The steep road up to the Palace stopped all three of them—two Austens and a Dodge."

Central to the book's theme, however, is the Dalai Lama's basic tenet that now, more than ever, every person on this planet must create within himself a deep sense of universal responsibility—towards both the environment and all other peoples of the world. "Until now . . . Mother Earth has tolerated sloppy house habits . . . (but now) she is telling us, 'My children are behaving badly.' She is warning us that there are limits to our actions."

"Clearly this is a pivotal generation. Global communication is possible, yet confrontations take place more often than meaningful dialogues for peace," wrote the Dalai Lama in one essay. On the path of peace, however, there is no doubt what goal the Dalai Lama is striving towards: "We intend to implement full democracy in a future free Tibet."

This single quotation encapsulates not only the Dalai Lama's struggle for Tibetan freedom and democracy, but also Galen Rowell's ultimate *raison d'être* for the publication of this stunningly beautiful, thought-provoking book, his and his wife Barbara's first self-produced title. In stirring words, the Dalai Lama writes of his conviction and hopes for a lasting peace, ecological awareness, and global harmony. In one his most powerful and diverse photographic collections, Rowell records the people, culture, mountains, and wildlife of Tibet. The combination of the two mediums, written and visual, is no less than a plea to the rest of the world to act upon the plight of the courageous Tibetan people, and to preserve before it is too late the disappearing, incomparable beauty that is The Roof of the World.

ED WEBSTER

The Editor also calls the readers' attention to *Freedom in Exile—The Autobiography of the Dalai Lama*, Harper Collins, New York, 1990 and Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, London, 1990. 288 pages, numerous photographs.

*The Karakoram—Mountains of Pakistan*. Shiro Shirahata. Cloudcap, Seattle, 1990. 192 pages, 101 color photographs of which 56 measure 14x20-inches and 45 measure 10x14-inches. \$75.00.