The Image Of Dalai Lama From European And Chinese Perspective

The Dalai Lama is a spiritual and political leader, who elects to be called a “Tibetan Buddhist Monk” (Reputation; book 1; Dalai Lama; pp 200). He is depicting himself as a humble – down to earth religious leader. However, his appearance on global platforms seems to contradict the image of a pious and self-effacing monk.

In the western world the Dalai Lama is seen as a charismatic figure, a man of peace and wisdom, admiring and following the pacifist principles of Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King. He has popularised Buddhism in the west and many have statues of the Buddha (although not as a religious symbol but a statement of interior design.) Nonetheless, the Dalai Lama’s status as a populist leader in the West reflects is cult standing. To them he is less of a religious guide, more of an inspirational guru. The Dalai Lama of recent times is a great supporter of progressive religion. He believes the move away from the dogmatic framework of religion, allows the masses to relate more the spiritual dimension of religion. His presence at Glastonbury is an example of this evolution embracing mass audiences to spread his message.

Patti Smith introduced the Dalai Lama as “his holiness” (Assignment booklet; assignment 3; pp 27). Patti uses monastic figurative language to express her respect for the spiritual leader. This respect arises from individual observations; personal influences and cultural stereotypes. His acceptance speech on his 80th birthday revolves around his ideology of peace, harmony and prosperity. He deliberately uses affectionate words like: “compassion, self-confidence and the importance of friendship” (Assignment booklet; assignment 3; pp 27) which portrays that he is aware of his social surroundings and acts according to them.

The Dalai Lama gave “Smith a big hug” (Assignment booklet; assignment 3; pp 27) before leaving the stage. An act that would be unsettling for the orthodox Buddhists who are traditionally patriarchal. The Dalai Lama challenges this dogmatic approach through his belief in gender equality. He can be seen as a modern religious preacher, who wants the Western world to see Buddhism as a progressive religion. He presents a Buddhism that is in harmony with other world religions. This helps to explain the growth of Buddhism in the West.

The Dalai Lama represents Tibetan people on geopolitical platforms. The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to him in 1989 acknowledging his work as an ecological activist and raising his profile across the globe. As a religious leader, he chooses not to ignore the role of science in benefitting humanity. This suggests that he is conscious that the only way forward in the Western democratic world is by showing progress and finding some scientific logic in religion.

The Chinese however see him as an antagonist who seeks to sow seeds of distrust between the Tibetans and Chinese government. The Chinese government has censored his activities and accused him of hypocrisy; they see him as a political figure undermining Chinese sovereignty and seeking autonomy for Tibet. The Western world’s acknowledgment of him has further emboldened China’s claim that his motives are political. However, his reputation in the Western world has made it impossible for the Chinese government to suppress the Tibetan Monks, since 1950. This is evident in his Glastonbury speech, when he says: “for the well-being

of others," (Assignment booklet; article from the Guardian; booklet pp 27) reinforcing his positive image in the Western world.

We can conclude that the Dalai Lama's reputation has been created by the European and Chinese propaganda. Both have used their media to achieve their own political goals. The Western world has used his reputation as a socio-political figure to destroy China's geopolitical standing whereas, China has used negative propaganda to suppress the Tibetan freedom movement.