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of the Queen**
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Obituaries

Riki Hyde-Chambers

Sartorially arresting advocate for Tibetan liberation who first brought the Dalai Lama to Britain in 1973 and enlisted MPs to the cause

Accompanying the Dalai Lama on his first visit to the UK in 1973, Riki Hyde-Chambers looked with horror at a tangled heap of saffron on the floor of the car.

Driving into the back of a Mini was not an auspicious start, but at least nothing was damaged apart from the passengers' dignity and the rear end of the Mini. After ten days they had visited the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, Westminster Abbey, Lambeth Palace, the West London Synagogue and the Houses of Parliament.

The Chinese embassy had lobbied the British government hard for the 38-year-old spiritual leader of Tibet not to be given a visa. The prime minister, Edward Heath, declined to receive him. However, among those that the Dalai Lama did charm during his visit were the Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey, the former prime minister Harold Macmillan, the virtuoso violinist Yehudi Menuhin and Lord Mountbatten.

The mission to put the plight of Tibet on the map had worked better than Hyde-Chambers had dared hope. The Dalai Lama's charisma had shone from the start. "I was worried that he would look the same as all the other lamas accompanying him and no one would be able to tell who he was, but I need not have worried on that score," recalled Hyde-Chambers, a leading campaigner at the Tibet Society. More problematic was managing people's unrealistic expectations of what Tibet's spiritual leader could do. "There was a perception that Tibetans had magical powers and if they were a lama even more so. People would ask him extraordinary questions, believing him to have the divine wisdom and foresight to know the answers."

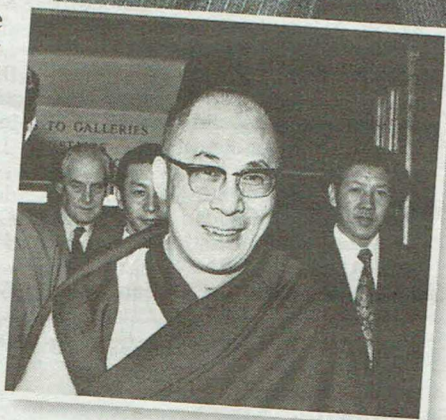
On the Dalai Lama's several later visits Hyde-Chambers would cut a contrasting figure to His Holiness, with his elegant attire topped off by signature bow-tie, giving him the air of Bertie Wooster having landed next to an eastern mystic in the course of one of his madcap adventures. Yet there was nothing whimsical about his mission. Hyde-Chambers advocated tirelessly for the self-determination of predominantly Buddhist Himalayan territory that had been "annexed" by China in 1950-51, leading to many of its religious leaders, including the Dalai Lama, being exiled to India in 1959 and thousands of Tibetan Buddhists seeking refuge in Britain.

When Hyde-Chambers finally secured permission from China to visit Tibet in 1991, two years after the latest uprising there, he made the most of the opportunity by secretly recording the stories of oppressed Tibetans and smuggling cassette tapes back to Britain taped to his body. "You could feel people's fear. Walk anywhere and someone would press a piece of paper into your hand." Hyde-Chambers would give their harrowing testimonies to the European parliament, but knew it would only go so far. His greatest sadness was to see Tibetans' naive belief that if the outside world understood their situation, things would change and Tibet would be liberated.

Fredrick Hyde-Chambers was born



Hyde-Chambers introduces the Dalai Lama at the Royal Albert Hall in 2008; the Dalai Lama, left, on his first visit to the UK in 1973, which China lobbied against



in Elephant and Castle, south London, in 1944 the son of a film editor; Derek Hyde-Chambers, and his wife, Margaret. As such, he became a child actor and was enrolled at a stage school. His mother was an early British supporter of the cause of Tibet and there were often Tibetans visiting the house. As a child Riki became intrigued by the distant Himalayan land through his correspondence with a Tibetan penfriend in Darjeeling, India. A thoughtful young man who was drawn to spiritual matters, Hyde-Chambers relinquished any acting ambitions and at the age of 16 started working for the Tibet Society in London. It was 1960, a year after an uprising in the capital, Lhasa, which had led to the first UN resolution on Tibet.

Another young supporter of Tibet whom he would get to know well was David Jones, later better known as David Bowie. Riki's father had first met Jones on a film set, where Derek Hyde-Chambers was a second unit director

and a film editor. Jones wanted to learn film editing and became a regular visitor to the Hyde-Chambers family flat above what is now the Abbey National on Baker Street. Bowie began visiting Tibet House, just north of Regent's Park, up to four times a week and during this period considered becoming a Buddhist monk. He would find his path as a musician. Hyde-Chambers would find his as a campaigner and throughout the Sixties much of the work involved helping to process visa applications for Tibetan refugees, who would arrive in London with wide-eyed won-

He considered 'western' Buddhists something of a mixed blessing

derment. "The one advantage was that there was minimal interference from China because it was too busy with the Cultural Revolution, which made advocacy easier," recalled Hyde-Chambers.

Another favourable wind was the coming of "flower power" in the late 1960s and the growing popularity of eastern mysticism in the West, exemplified by the Beatles' dalliance with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Even so, Hyde-Chambers often considered British converts something of a mixed

blessing, especially when being accosted by "western Buddhists" and asked: "I've done my introductory class, can I have my enlightenment certificate?"

After the success of the Dalai Lama's first visit to Westminster in 1973, Hyde-Chambers became convinced that the most effective way he could help the cause would be to work in parliament. He became an assistant to the Conservative MP John Cordle, which led to him being invited to work for the embryonic Industry and Parliament Trust when it was formed in 1977. He was appointed executive director of the trust that aims to foster greater dialogue between parliament and industry and stayed until 2002. During his decades with the IPT, he would help other countries adopt the model, setting up parliamentary and economic dialogue centres in Georgia and Tanzania. He was appointed OBE in 2003 for services to the business community as much as to the Tibetan cause.

Hyde-Chambers embraced the Dalai Lama's creed that "we should develop a sense of concern for the whole of humanity, the whole world" and espoused other causes. He became an influential figure in the ultimately successful campaign to allow Gurkha veterans living in Nepal to settle in the UK.

He would go on to serve as executive chairman of Enterprise and Parlia-

mentary Dialogue International from 2003. Through all this parliamentary work, he brought the occupation of Tibet to the attention of MPs and organised visits there for the All-Party Tibet Group.

One of his proudest achievements was helping to secure the Dalai Lama's nomination for the Nobel peace prize, liaising with supporters of the Tibetan cause all over the world. It took several years but the Dalai Lama was awarded the prize in 1989.

Hyde-Chambers would serve as chairman of the Tibet Society and the Tibet Relief Fund from 2007 and introduced the Dalai Lama at the Royal Albert Hall in 2008. He received thanks in return: "Riki was here on my first visit in 1973," said the Dalai Lama. "And since then in his face there has not been much change. He is physically not very big, but he is full of energy and warm feeling."

Hyde-Chambers was optimistic about the future, pointing to the uptake of Buddhism in China, the way that Tibetans were becoming more sophisticated in expressing their national identity, and how so many Tibetans remained committed to a path of non-violence.

However, he advised patience. Tibetans, and in particular the Tibetan government-in-exile, should stop depicting themselves as victims and focus instead on the considerable contribution that the Tibetan diaspora makes in the world, he urged.

He married Audrey Smith in 1977. They separated in 2008 and he is survived by their sons: Robin is a chief executive of a finance company and Julian works in retail. In later years Hyde-Chambers became a founding member of the Ozanne Foundation that works with religious organisations around the world to eliminate discrimination based on gender or sexuality. He is survived by his male partner, Fuad Janmohamed.

Hyde-Chambers was an expert on the history of playing cards and when he died he was part-way through writing a book about the failed Monmouth Rebellion to depose James II in 1685. When his son Robin took up carriage driving, Riki, then in his sixties, would act as "backstepper".

He wrote five books on Tibetan themes, including an anthology of folk tales and novels based on the early life of the Dalai Lama, but recalled being told by one publisher that unless the main protagonist was western the book would not sell.

Hyde-Chambers remained an unfailingly courteous figure: his favourite expression was "you're so kind". Yet he was often cagey when asked about his personal adherence to Buddhism. However, by the end of his life he admitted that he considered himself a Tibetan Buddhist, "more or less by a process of osmosis". Anyone looking closely enough at Hyde-Chambers' smart attire, while not being distracted by his colourful bow tie, would notice Buddhist prayer beads discreetly hanging from his wrist.

Riki Hyde-Chambers, OBE, campaigner for Tibet, was born on May 12, 1944. He died after a short illness on October 31, 2021, aged 77