

An Overview of Tibetan History, Part 5:

Tibet in the Chinese Qing Dynasty

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In 1723, Lhobsang Danjin tried to revive the Khoshut Khanate and controlled parts of Qinghai, but he failed in 1724. The Chinese Qing Dynasty regained the control of the territory. The city of Xining (a Chinese city which was founded probably in the Han Dynasty or even earlier) which was the center of the area became Qinghai's capital now.

The control of the territory was favored by the pro-Qing government in Tibet that sought to regain influence in Amdo and Kham that has been lost since the fall of the Yarlung Dynasty in 842. Many of those belonging to the aristocracy however were against the Qing dynasty and its forces. The reason for this is evident once again. The principalities in Tibet were enemies among each other since the 9th century. Many people wanted to be the rulers of whole Tibet, and therefore the Tibetan government saw an ally in China to protect their rule. Many hostile families allied with the Dzungars which were later defeated in 1720. Since the second-installed 6th Dalai Lama was not recognized by the Tibetan religious leaders and the real 6th Dalai Lama was killed by Lhasang Khan in 1706, there was no legal Dalai Lama in office. During the Dzungar invasion (1717-1720), most principalities were against the Dzungars since they feared to receive a Dzungar puppy regime and therefore the Chinese chose a 7th Dalai Lama from the Kham principalities (in nowadays Sichuan) in accordance with the Tibetans, and fought against the Dzungars to enthrone him.

As the enthronation showed a longer presence of the Chinese in Tibet, many hostile principalities thus allied with the Dzungars then. The Tibetan government therefore asked to be incorporated into the Qing Dynasty to protect the rulers against the hostile principalities. Therefore, Tibet joined China under the condition to receive political autonomy. In return, military tasks were now Chinese and Chinese civilians settled in Tibet. The Qing emperor sent a troop consisting of 2,000 soldiers to Tibet to protect the land. In 1728, an 'amban' (昂邦, *angbang*) office was established in Tibet. These two ambans belonged to the 'Lifan Yuan' (理藩院) – an agency that was in charge to control the border areas of China and protect them from invasions. The following areas of Tibet were part of China in the Qing Dynasty: West Tibet (Ngari and Ladakh), Central Tibet (Wü-Zang) and South Tibet (Tawang area), and East Tibet (Kham and Amdo). Tibet was formally split in two provinces: Tibet

(consisting of West Tibet, Wü-Zang and Kham), and Kōkōnur (Qinghai) – consisting of most parts of Amdo. However, in fact Tibet was still split in many principalities and kingdoms and it was not centrally governed. Therefore, the division in two provinces (as indicated on maps) should not lead to the false conclusion that Tibet also consisted of only two provinces de facto. Parts of nowadays Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture were probably administrated by Ganshan Province (nowadays Gansu and Shaanxi), although the western part of the prefecture was under administration of Qinghai. Already in 1721, the Qing installed three Tibetan ministers in Tibet, so called ‘kashags’ (噶廈) and therefore the year 1721 is normally regarded the year when Tibet joined China. There were two Tibetan generals that held armies supporting the Qing to defeat the Dzungars in 1720. One was **Polhaney** from Zang in Central Tibet, and the other one was **Khangchennä** from Ngari. From 1721 to 1727, Khangchennä was the head of the cabinet and therefore the kashags were subdued to him. Polhaney received the administrative jurisdiction over Zang, while Khangchennä was ruler of Ngari. The Tibetan government wanted to restore the Nyingma temples which were destroyed by the Dzungars, but the 7th Dalai Lama opposed to it. A new administration model was introduced in 1723. According to this model, the cabinet were the ruling princes over Wü-Zang, Ngari and Kongpo (an area in nowadays Western Nyingchi’s Gongbo’gyamda County). This new model raised large tensions (probably between the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan military fraction) and Khangchennä was assassinated in 1727 when the situation escalated. Directly after the assassination, three henchmen (Charaba, Lumpanä, Ngaphöpa¹) of the Dalai Lama mobilised their military forces in Wü and Kongpo. Some hundred men were ordered to overthrow and kill Polhaney but all of them failed. Meanwhile, forces in Ngari and Zang allied and informed the Chinese emperor. A civil war broke out. After half a year, Ngaphöpa was defeated and Polhaney went towards Lhasa with a troop consisting of at about 9,000 soldiers. While he conquered the city, his opponents and probably even the amban hid in the Potala Palace. The Dalai Lama was allowed to go to Drepung monastery, while all other enemies of Polhaney were taken as prisoners on 5 July 1728. The imperial army which should give support in the civil war arrived two months later. At that time, the civil war was already over. Many clerics, supporters of anti-Qing troops and the head of the uprising were executed. Lumpanä and Ngaphöpa were executed through the well-feared ‘death of thousand cuts’. Since the civil war showed the weakness of the Tibetan government and the Chinese Qing did not want to lose its face by not being able to protect the government, a new government model was introduced in 1728. The head of state now became Polhaney, he was supervised by two Manchu ambans. In addition, the 5th Penchen Lama **Lobsang Yeshe** was made the ruler of Western Zang and the

head of spiritual matters in Tibet. The Dalai Lama was sent back to his hometown in the Lithang kingdom in Kham ².

Polhaney could strengthen his power in Tibet and was often regarded as the 'ruling prince' ³. He is famous for two important things that occurred during his rule: The first is the first printed edition of the Tibetan version of the Buddhist Canon, and second, he introduced a post system that made it possible to send letters safely through whole Tibet including Amdo and Kham.

At around this time, the Europeans had a first interest in Tibet. It was in 1624, when Portuguese missionaries came to Guge kingdom in Ngari. It is said that the king of Guge even accepted Christianity. In 1724, Catholic missionaries were granted a piece of land in Lhasa, and the Dalai Lama even visited the chapel ⁴. However, it was in 1745 when all missionaries were expelled from Tibet. In 1747, Polhaney died, leading to a new destabilization of Tibet.

In 1750, the anti-Qing forces tried to conduct a riot and killed the Han-Chinese and Manchurians living in Lhasa. As a result a new political model was introduced in 1751 and the rioters – like in 1728 – were executed. The position of the Dalai Lama was restored, the role of the kashag was strengthened, while the title 'desi' was formally abolished ⁵. The kashag now consisted of four ministers ⁶. One minister had to be a monk, the other three had to be secular ⁷.

Kychanov and Melnichenko point out that the reforms also included the creation of a Tibetan army. Every family who owned land had to provide one soldier ⁸. It should be added, that the Tibetans already had small armies several times, such as the army under Polhaney. However, there was never a permanent army, and the soldiers were never part of a central army, but belonged to the separate principalities and kingdoms. This time, it would not be too different since the Ganden Phodrang did not have control over all of Tibet. In Wü, there has been 1,000 soldiers, in Zang even 2,000 soldiers ⁹.

The 6th Penchen Lama Lobsang Baidain Yêxê had very good ties to the Chinese emperor and was even invited to his 70th birthday (in 1778). Therefore, the strong ties between the Chinese and the Penchen Lama continued. In 1762, he gave pre-novice ordination to the 8th Dalai Lama in Lhasa's Potala Palace ¹⁰.

In 1862, the Dungan revolt broke out in Ganshan Province (nowadays Gansu and Shaanxi) and spread to Xinjiang. The revolt was probably supported by the British and Ottomans through Kashgarian troops led by Yaqub Beg and Russians which supported the Taranchi in Yili in Xinjiang. Areas affected by the rebellion also included Qinghai. The Dungan revolt was conducted by several Muslim ethnicities, however it was no religious revolt. The revolt

ended in 1877 with a victory of the Qing army. An even more dangerous threat came from outside. In 1792, the Nepalese tried to invade Tibet, but the Chinese army protecting Tibet defeated the invasion of the Nepalese quickly. The structure of the government was now changed once again.

In 1834, the Sikh Empire started a conquest in Ladakh. He hoped to move through Ladakh to Ngari via the **Mayumla Pass** which connects both sides of the Himalaya. Thus, the Sikh Empire hoped to move forward into Tibet very quickly. The Sikh army also conquered Baltistan and recruited Balti soldiers. It is believed nowadays that the Sikhs had economic interests in Tibet to be able to stand against the British. In May 1841, an army of 6,000 men in three divisions marched into Tibet's mainland situated on the other side of the Himalaya. At that time, Wü-Zang and Ngari had tensed relationship with Ladakh which goes back to the Tibet-Ladakh-Mughal war from the 17th century. Since Ladakh supported Bhutan during the Tibetan invasions, and since the Ladakhis did not accept the Gelug rule of Tibet after 1642, the 5th Dalai Lama sent troops for punishment to Ladakh. The Muslim Mughal Empire supported the Ladakhis, which in return wanted to convert to Islam. The Mughal Empire defeated the Tibetans and Ladakh was partly independent for some time. The Namgyal dynasty ended in 1834, when the Ladakhi king was dethroned and sent in a small prairie village outside of Leh. When the Sikh entered Western Tibet's Ngari area in 1841, the **Sino-Sikh War** (Dogra War, 森巴战争) started. The Dogra army occupied Rutog, Gartok, Tsaparang (which was the capital of the kingdom Guge) and Burang¹¹ – and thus nowadays Rutog County, Gar County and Burang County in Ngari Prefecture were mostly affected. The Dogra Commander Zorawar Singh fell in the battle¹², which turned out to be very harsh during winter in Tibet. Tibetan military groups entered Ladakh, but were defeated in 1842¹³. In the aftermath, negotiation for a peace treaty began in Leh¹⁴, leading to the status quo ante bellum. The treaty was probably signed in September 1842, the war actions stopped a month earlier.

A second Dungan revolt broke out in 1895 effecting Qinghai, and thus Tibetan Amdo region in Eastern Tibet. Unlike the first revolt, the second revolt was of fundamental religious nature. In Xunhua County in nowadays Haidong City in Qinghai's very north, several Muslim ethnicities such as the Hui, Salar, Dongxiang and Bao'an were demanded to join together to start a rebellion by Ma Yonglin. The Qing army reacted by killing all rebels except Ma Wanfu who surrendered.

In 1904, the British commander Francis Younghusband started an invasion into Tibet, since he feared that the Russians would invade Tibet first, otherwise. The British did not recognize the border between India and China, and therefore claimed Tibet.

The Tibetans tried to stop the army by blocking the ways. The British killed the rebelling Tibetans, leading to the **Massacre of Chumik Shenko**. The British went on to Gyantse (གྱའུ་རྩེ། , rgyal rtse) in Zang area, and later reached Lhasa. The Dalai Lama had to flee into mainland China. When the British arrived, the ambans escorted them to the palace, stating that no one is there to negotiate with them. At the same time, the ambans advised the Chinese emperor to dispose the Dalai Lama from all his offices. Therefore, Younghusband forced other political offices to sign the **Treaty of Lhasa** that he drafted himself. Tibet thus became a British protectorate, which the Chinese could not accept. The amban called the treaty to be invalid, while the British accepted the Chinese staying in Tibet. In 1906, the **Anglo-Chinese Convention** was signed in which the Chinese were allowed to rebuy the Tibetan territory. The British declared not to intervene in Tibet or even annex it, and the Chinese were not allowed to let any other country administrate or interfere into Tibet. In this way, the British interests were ensured, especially that Russia could not interfere. The 1906 Anglo-Chinese Convention succeeded the Treaty of Lhasa. Western Tibet's Ladakh and Southern Tibet's Sikkim were under British influence as well as Bhutan that fought the **Bhutan War** in 1864. The expedition of Younghusband left a bloody trace in Tibet, since the Tibetans tried to fight against the British, but had bad weapons. Therefore, the Chinese decided in 1905 that Tibet should be incorporated stronger into China to ensure their safety. Thus, the military general Zhao Erfeng (赵尔丰), belonging to the 'blue banner', was commanded to end the Tibetan autonomy, and to punish all kind of resistance without mercy. He invaded the Kham principalities in Sichuan in 1906 killing monks which tried to resist him. In 1907, he reached Southern Kham and in 1908, he marched into Central Tibet to install the leadership of the pro-Qing Penchen Lama (who traditionally opposed the Dalai Lama).

When the Chinese Revolution broke out in 1911, Zhao was captured and beheaded. In the same year, the Kham kingdoms, as well as the principalities of the minorities merged into a special administrative zone 'Xikang' (西康). The area was probably already installed in 1905 under Zhao. It was originally called Chuanbian Special Administrative District in 1912, and then later renamed in Xikang. With the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912 and the civil-war like conditions starting in 1916, Tibet had to face a new situation, and new wars would break out, since Tibet was hold together by the Qing. With the fall of the Qing, the hostility between Wü-Zang and Dokham (朵康, Amdo and Kham) would lead to new troubles.

Notes:

1. All three have been ministers under Khangchennä's cabinet
2. compare Richardson, Hugh E.: Tibet and its History, Boston/ London 1984, p.52
3. for his formal role, compare and see Richardson (1984), p. 53
4. Кычанов Е.И.; Мельниченко Б.Н.: История Тибета с древнейших времен до наших дней, Москва 2005, стр. 89
5. Кычанов; Мельниченко (2005), стр. 90
6. *ibid.*
7. *ibid.*
8. *ibid.*
9. *ibid.*
10. Khetsu Sangpo Rinpoche: Life and times of the Eighth to Twelfth Dalai Lamas, in: The Tibet Journal, Vol. 7, 1982, p. 47
11. Кычанов; Мельниченко (2005), стр. 98
12. *ibid.*
13. *ibid.*
14. *ibid.*

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