

An Overview of Tibetan History, Part 6:

Tibet in Republican China, foreign occupation and liberation by the Chinese army in the 1950s

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The early 20th century is a very important spot in the Tibetan history, since the falsification and/ or confusion of historical events in Western media spread the myth of an independent Tibet that never existed in the 20th century, and which is meant to damage the Chinese territorial integrity. In the 19th century, the British already tried to weaken China, not only in the Opium Wars, but also in two invasions of Tibet. The first invasion was a secret try to annex the territory by building roads and infrastructure from Sikkim into Tibet that was part of Chinese Qing dynasty. Britain regarded the neighbouring Chinese as a threat for British India, and therefore attacked after the Qing forces put up barriers to protect the border.

On 20 March 1888, British troops attacked Tibetan troops at Mount Lungdo ¹. As the Tibetans were poorly equipped, the militia failed and the British came into the country. The Chinese Qing sought peace talks and as a result, they had to give away Sikkim to Great Britain ².

In 1904, the British came again leaving a blood trace in Tibet. Wang Jiawei and Nyima Gyaincain state that after 15 minutes of negotiations between Younghusband and Tibetan representatives in Qoimishango, a British officer took a pistol and killed the Tibetan representatives ³ and then went on killing over 500 Tibetan troops (that had removed their weapons, since they trusted in the peace talks). In the end, over 1,000 Tibetans were killed in a massacre that became famous as the massacre of Chumik-Shenko. The invasion ended with the forced Treaty of Lhasa, making Tibet a British protectorate. The rebellion against the British forces was that strong, that the British offered China to rebuy Tibet in 1906. In 1905, the British wanted to impress the Penchen Lama who refused to cooperate and supported China only. As a result, the British tried to win the 13th Dalai Lama to support Britain, since the Dalai Lama fraction and his Gelug school opposed the rule of the Qing Dynasty and had a tensed relation with other Tibetan Buddhist schools (which I pointed out in my previous articles, already). The Dalai Lama himself was in Mongolia, since he couldn't handle the chaotic and unorganised situation in splitted Tibet anymore. The British promised advantages

and benefits in British trade, “persuading them to see the British as the source of economic income”⁴.

At the same time, the Qing forces had to handle dissatisfaction from all parts of China. The Opium Wars, the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) which ended with a Japanese victory and the Boxer rebellion from 1899-1901 which was fought between the Eight-Nation alliance and the Qing-loyal Boxers ending with a victory for the alliance brought trouble and rebellion in all parts of China. In Tibet, the Tibetans didn't feel protected anymore by the Qing army after the Second British invasion and the Qing thus suspended the Tibetan autonomy to put Tibet closer into China, making Zhao Erfeng the military head to fight against any dissatisfaction. As dissatisfaction was very widespread and rebellions took place, Zhao killed anyone who resisted against him, leading to the surname ‘Zhao, the slaughterer’. In 1911, when the Chinese rebellion broke out and hit the Qing dynasty in its core, Zhao was caught and beheaded by Chinese Republicans. In February 1912, the mother of the underage emperor Puyi abducted on behalf of him, ending the 2,000 year imperial Chinese timeline. Soon after the founding of the Republic of China by military dictator Yuan Shikai, the 13th Dalai Lama contacted him. The Dalai Lama sent representatives to the Chinese government headed by Silun Qamqen⁵. Both parties signed a peace treaty in July 1912. The Han-Chinese agreed to pay a compensation for the “losses inflicted by Sichuan troops”⁵ (Sichuan troops is probably referring to Zhao's former army). In return, the Chinese officials stayed in office in Tibet⁵.

On 19 July 1912, Yuan Shikai's government set up an office being in charge for Tibetan and Mongolian affairs, headed by Goingsang Norbu⁶. In early 1913, the 13th Dalai Lama announced that the documents of Yuan Shikai's government do not need to be fulfilled, leading to the myth that Tibet separated from China which is not true. However, it is true that the government of the Republic of China and the Tibetan officials supporting the Gelug school and thus the Dalai Lama had tense relations.

Wang Jiawei and Nyima Gyaincain point out that after the Wuchang Uprising in October 1911, “at least 14 out of 18 inland provinces declared independence”⁷, which means they declared independence from the Qing dynasty, but not from China itself.

In 1911, the former kingdoms and principalities of Kham within Sichuan formed a new administrative zone called ‘Xikang’. It did not include Dêqên in Yunnan and Yüxu (Yushu) in Qinghai which also belongs to Kham.

While many Western sources try to propagate the image that China separated the Tibetan areas and joined them in several provinces, in fact it was the opposite. The splitted royal

territories now joined together. Again, this was rather formally in the beginning and the factual realisation would take time until the founding of the People's Republic of China.

It is very interesting to take a deeper look on Tibetan history between 1916 and 1949. In 1916, Yuan Shikai who thought to gain longevity (or immortality) died surprisingly. As he did not believe to die that soon, he never talked about a successor. Several warlords tried to act in his legacy, leading to chaotic circumstances in whole China, and factual civil war-like conditions. China had other problems now than showing a large interest in Tibet, leading to the fact that the Gelug school tried to segregate from China, however the Tibetans never left China formally and at the same time, they could not found an own national state due to religious and political tensions.

In 1912, Ma Fuxiang, a Chinese Muslim (and thus belonging to the "Hui ethnicity"), became the governor of Kōkōnur. In 1928, it became officially the province of Qinghai. Other Muslim warlords of the Ma Clique would follow governing Qinghai until 1932, when the **Qinghai-Tibet War** broke out. Since the British wanted to expand the territory of Tibet to Qinghai and Xikang (both known as "East Tibet"), they supported the 13th Dalai Lama for territorial expansion. Here comes an important point: Since East Tibet was never governed by (Central) Tibet after the fall of the Yarlung Dynasty in 842, and since the Tibetan tribes in Kham and Amdo were hostile to those in Wü-Zang, there was no wish from Qinghai and Xikang to join with Tibet. After the attack on Yushu area in Qinghai, Ma Bufang's army quickly overran the Tibetan armies. The Dalai Lama lost so much of its territory that he telegraphed British India for help. The British then pressured China to declare a ceasefire⁸. The war ended with the Tibetan defeat and thus Qinghai and Xikang stayed independent provinces within China. The peace treaties were signed in 1933 between the Tibetans and Ma Bufang for Qinghai and Liu Wenhui from the Sichuan Clique (1927-1938) representing Xikang.

Meanwhile, another problem in Qinghai seemed to be of religious nature. The Ma Clique consisted of Muslim Chinese (Hui) and Salar people, in a predominantly Buddhist region. However, there is less research on this issue, and therefore it is difficult to describe the relation between the Buddhists and Muslims in Qinghai during that time. Ma Bufang, for instance was said to be very secular, even accepting Buddhism and Christianity openly in Qinghai, while Ma Qin was described to attack monasteries and fighting a gruesome war against the Goloks.

Ma Bufang allied with the Penchen Lama to protect Tibetans from the Dalai Lama and his henchmen.

Xikang was formally declared a province in 1939, making Kangding its capital. The province consisted of most of traditional Kham area, excluding Dêqên and Yüxu (Yushu), and thus joined the Kham people in one province, just as Amdo people were joined in one province (i.e. Qinghai), too. The idea was to bring the splitted Tibetan factions together, but in practise, it was very difficult, since there was no central government in China. In Qinghai, the Tibetans ruled mostly themselves in communities under Ma Bufang, and in Kham's Xikang Province, Kesang Tsering was appointed head of the local government by the Chinese, where he should teach Sun Yatsen's ideological 'Three principles of the People' (三民主义), which stayed Taiwan's national ideology until the 1990's.

In Central Tibet, there have been several troubles. In 1914, the Simla Accord was signed between Great Britain, the Tibetan government and the central government of the Republic of China, confirming that Tibet belongs to China, but that China has no right to interfere politically into Central Tibet, while acknowledging that the other Tibetan-inhabited regions, called 'Inner Tibet' were governed by China. In this accord, Great Britain also annexes South Tibet's Tawang area. On 3 July 1914, the Chinese withdrew the contract, and the British thus denied any claims to China, calling it a bilateral contract between Britain and Tibet, granting Tibet de facto the right of an independent state. This status of course was illegal, and thus no country accepted the independence of Tibet, which in fact was not installed either. In Tibet, a new civil war broke out between the Dalai Lama forces who tried to promote an independent Tibet now, and the Penchen Lama who supported China. Concerning the legal status of Tibet during that time, Tibet was still a special zone within China, and therefore Tibet had several special rights, such as its own local government enjoying autonomy. In the 1930s and 1940s, most of Tibet practically was under influence of Chinese-backed regents.

In 1947, when India became independent from Great Britain, Sikkim refused to join India. Just like all other Tibetan areas, Sikkim is multicultural. The main population are the Sikkimese Bhutia, speaking Sikkimese language (also known as Drejongkä), which is in fact a South Tibetan dialect, which is 85% mutually intelligible with Standard Tibetan and Dzongkha. Sikkim however decided to join India in 1975. Another Tibetan area that stayed in India is Ladakh. Baltistan joined Pakistan.

Meanwhile, in 1949 the civil war between Chinese nationalists and communists ended. Mao Zedong thus took control over all provinces, while the Guomindang only controlled Taiwan Province. As Tibet was regarded a Chinese province all the time, Mao Zedong also wanted to reintegrate Tibet into China, as Tibet never left China formally. A new problem was about to occur now. The Amdo and Kham Tibetans did not want to join Tibet, to form a "Greater

Tibet” Province. To go even further, the Amdo and Kham even didn’t refer to themselves as Tibetans anymore. Since Amdo did not have any contact to Central Tibet since the fall of the Yarlung Dynasty, they regarded themselves as an own nationality now and did not want to be confused with the Tibetans. Same goes to the people in Kham. For this reason, there is no real name to call Tibetans in Tibetan language until today. The Amdo Tibetans call themselves ‘Amdowa’ (ཨ་མདོ་པ། , a mdo pa; 安多人), while the Kham Tibetans refer to themselves as ‘Kampa’ or ‘Khampa’ (ཁམས་པ། , khams pa; 康巴人). The inhabitants of West Tibet in Ladakh and Baltistan call themselves ‘Ladakhis’ and ‘Baltis’, the Bhutanese Ngalop, who speak Dzongkha, the main language of Bhutan, which is in fact a Tibetan dialect, call themselves ‘Ngalongpa’ (སྒལ་ལོང་པ། , snga long pa). Muslim Tibetans in all over Tibet, call themselves ‘Kache’ people. The traditional word for Tibet, used during Yarlung Dynasty ‘Pö’ (བོད། , bod) was only preserved in Wü-Zang and Ngari. The word for Tibetan ethnicity in Standard Tibetan is ‘Poirig’ (བོད་རིགས། , bod rigs), which was used for the people inhabiting Central Tibet. Thus, when Mao Zedong wanted to unite Tibet, ethnic tensions were about to arise, since the Amdo and Kham Tibetans did not want to be identified with the other Tibetans. On 4 November 1949, the Tibetan regent Taktra declared unilateral independence from the People’s Republic of China ⁹, founded by Mao Zedong on 1 October in the same year. This unilateral claim for independence was not recognized by any independent state. In 1950, the PLA went into Tibet and in 1965, the Tibetan Province was upgraded into the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). This was modeled after other areas, such as Inner Mongolia, which was founded in 1947, even before the formal establishment of the PRC. The scheme itself was modeled after the Soviet idea that different nationalities within a country have a right for national self-determination within their own territorial area within the Communist state. In January 1950, the Central Committee of the CPC set up a Bureau for South-West affairs to deal with the incorporation of Tibet. Since the Soviet ideal also included negotiations with local rulers, Mao Zedong invited the Dalai Lama and his delegation, as well as the 10th Penchen Lama to sign a treaty. This treaty which is known as **Seventeen Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet** was signed by Ngapoi Ngawang Jigmê (ང་ཕོད་དགའ་བའ་འཇིགས་མེད། , nga phod ngag dbang ’jigs med) and also defended by the 10th Penchen Lama. Both were loyal to China, as many others in the population, too. Many people hoped that the feudal system would be abolished in Tibet. And here comes the important point. Tibet has suffered a feudal system in its whole history, in which kings, high officials and clerics had privileges over the normal population. However, by 1950 the amount of privileged people and those who had to

work for them and feed them were at about the same amount. The Chinese government spread the idea of Communism in which everyone shall be equal and where no one is to be privileged or can decide over others. That's the theory, and people in Tibet started to identify themselves with these values. I don't know how much Tibetans really understood about communism and I don't know whether they really understood Mao Zedong's ideology, but in fact, the Tibetans saw a chance in gaining social equality. I assume that for this reason the Dalai Lama had no other possibility than to agree on signing this treatment, in case that he doesn't want to be ousted by the people, as the Dalai Lama was very unpopular. The reason for this lies in religious affairs between the Gelug school and other schools. His opponent, the Penchen Lama was loyal to China, as his predecessors were. The 10th Penchen Lama Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen (alternative spelling: Qoigyí Gyaicain; ལོ་བཟང་ཚེས་ཀྱི་ལྷ་ལ་མཚན་, blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan) even joined the CPC. Therefore, we had two fronts again: one pro-Chinese which was favored by the parts of the aristocracy who wanted to support the common people and anti-Chinese aristocracy which wanted to keep their privileges. Since the Tibetan clerics enjoy a large authority in Tibet, I assume that the mood among the common people was conformed to the opinion that the Tibetan school to which one belonged to represented. On the same time, ethnic minorities in Tibet supported the Chinese, since the Tibetans discriminated them in history. The Mönpa (also spelled Monpa; མོན་པ་, mon pa; 门巴族) living in Nyingchi and Tawang in traditional South Tibet were granted an own ethnicity, same as the Lhoba originally living in their own piece of land called Lhoyü (ལྷོ་ཡུལ་, lho yul), while “yü” means land or country. They are the smallest ethnic minority in China and a very heterogenous group consisting of several tribes speaking different languages. Most Lhobas are living in India-occupied South Tibet's Tawang now.

They are called Lhopas (ལྷོ་པ་, lho pa) in Standard Tibetan meaning “Southern people” (南方人). Their biggest ethnic subgroup are the Idu people (义都人), also called Mishmi people. Other minorities are the Sherpas, Dengba (‘Deng people’) and Thami which are not recognized yet, since the 10th Penchen Lama stated that the recognition of these people would be a split off Tibetans in their own land. Since the Chinese want to keep the local Tibetan loyals, they silently agreed on this. However, the Sherpas are recently discussed to be recognized soon, and within TAR they are de facto recognized already.

With the establishment of the PRC, the province of Xikang as well as Qinghai were kept, instead of merging with Tibet to avoid internal conflicts between the Kham and Amdo Tibetans. The Tibetans in whole China have been called ‘Zangzu’ (藏族) now, going back

to the traditional area 'Zang' and its capital Xigazê in which the Penchen Lama has its seat. While Qinghai and Xikang were known as 'East Tibet', Central Tibet and Ngari now became 'West Tibet' (西藏). Already in 1950, Qamdo was probably separated from Xikang and became its own 'Qamdo region' (昌都地区). Less research on this issue was done until today, and therefore this can't be completely proved evidently yet.

Xikang province consisted of Ya'an City (雅安市), the new provincial capital after the establishment of the PRC, Ya'an administrative division (雅安专区), Xichang administrative division (西昌专区), Liangshan Autonomous Region for Yi-Nationality (凉山彝族自治区) and the Xikang Provincial Tibetan Autonomous Region (西康省藏族自治区).

In 1955, Xikang was completely dissolved. Qamdo and Ngyingchi districts were merged into Tibet, which means that from now on Tibet was larger, or in other words the province of Tibet won territory. The eastern parts of Xikang became the western parts of Sichuan. Between 1721 and 1912, Garzê and Ngawa were already formally in Sichuan province, however they never were fully integrated and the kingdoms remained. This changed after the dissolution as Garzê and Ngawa were fully integrated into the Chinese system, but preserved special rights that are granted to every minority. Again, an ethnic group had an advantage: the Qiang. The Qiang were not recognized by the Tibetans in Central Tibet, and always counted as 'Khampas with their own local tradition'. For the first time, the Qiangic people were recognized and therefore the preservation of their culture was guaranteed. Just as the Lhoba, the Qiang are not one single entity, but several ethnic groups that are close to each other. The most famous ethnic Qiang group are probably the Gyarong, speaking Gyarong (嘉绒), Ergong (尔龚) and Lavrung (拉乌戎) language, all the three being classified as Gyarongic languages by Sun Hongkai in 2001¹⁰. Northern Qiangic languages include Northern and Southern Qiang and Southern Qiangic languages include Ersu language. The distinct Tangut language, which was the main language of the Western Xia, also belonged to the Qiangic languages. Sun already described the Qiangic languages in 1983, the later 2001 description is better and on deeper research, I guess.

The situation in Qinghai was even more complex in 1950. The political functionality of the province of Qinghai within the PRC was established on January 1. The borders of the province almost completely stayed the same as before, and thus Qinghai remained in its old territorial borders. Qinghai is composed of many ethnicities. In history, during war times and other social instable periods, persecuted and displaced people sought to hide in Qinghai, such as the Golok people, which were a multi-ethnic group until the 1930s consisting of nomadic

refugees and rebels that were feared as bandits. The Salars were originally from Samarkand in nowadays Uzbekistan. During Tang dynasty, the Salars had first contacts with China, they later sought refuge in China and arrived at least in Ming dynasty. The Yugurs are thought to be descendents of Uyghurs who fled from the territory of the Uyghur Empire after it fell in 840. The Yugurs are famously known as 'Yellow Uyghurs'. In 870, they founded the Ganzhou Uyghur Khanate which existed until 1036. One year later, they became part of the Western Xia, and thus the Tanguts. During Qing dynasty, they were eventually treated as Tibetan tribe. However, since they are relatives to the Uyghurs, the Western Yugur language is a Turkic language which belongs to the South Siberian branch (although Uyghur belongs to the Turkic Karluk languages), which again is less surprising as the Yugurs were under Mongolian influence from the North. The Eastern Yugur language is a Mongolian language, and therefore speakers of Eastern Yugur probably understand or speak Southern Mongolian. Yugur is very special, since it is spoken by one ethnic group, but has two languages of two completely different language families. However, Yugurs were of Turkic descent and under Mongolian influence, and therefore this is quite plausible!

In contrast, another ethnic group seems quite indigenous to the area: the White Mongols, known as Monguors (蒙古尔) or in Chinese 'Tu' (土族). They probably arrived very early in Tibet, and while many people argue that the word for Tibet was derived from Arabic 'Tibat', some argue that the name Tibet comes from an Old Mongolian dialect, spoken by the Monguors or their ancestors.

In 1954, the Haixi Mongol, Tibetan and Kazakh Autonomous District was founded, which was known as Dulan County before. The Kazakhs left Haixi later, and thus in 1985 the autonomous prefecture was called 'Haixi Autonomous Prefecture for Mongols and Tibetans'. The surrounding of a town called Tanggula was already incorporated into Haixi in 1954. Tanggula is an exclave, as Yushu lies in between. I can only assume two reasons for the creation of this exclave. They either have a larger amount of Mongolian people living there, or which is quite more realistic, the area is inhabited by Amdo Tibetans. Yushu prefecture is inhabited by Kham Tibetans, and since there is hostility between the clans, I guess that Tanggula was separated from Yushu, since it belongs to Amdo culturally (I assume). Nowadays, over 50% of the population of Qinghai are ethnic Han Chinese, while only 20% are Tibetan. However, the tribal areas of the Tibetans are much larger than the areas where Chinese are settling. Chinese villages however seem to be much bigger and Qinghai's only two big cities Xining and Haidong are (traditionally) mainly inhabited by Han Chinese, while the West of Qinghai is inhabited by Mongolians and Tibetans. The Southern parts of Qinghai

are inhabited by Tibetans. In Northern parts of Qinghai, the Hui, Dongxiang, Bonan and Salar can be found which are also settling in Gansu.

The ethnic diversity of the Tibetan-inhabited areas is very large. The Tibetan area in Yunnan, Dêqên Autonomous Prefecture for Tibetans is mainly inhabited by Tibetans and Lisu (both making up at about 30% each), while Han Chinese make up at about 16%. The structure of ethnic minorities in Dêqên is typical of Yunnan, as many Naxi, Bai and Yi live there – which are all native to Yunnan. Other local ethnic groups include the Pumi, the Hui and the Miao, the latter one are very widespread in other areas in China, too and therefore the Miao have no link to Tibet at all.

In 1955, people in the TAR were so discouraged about the fact that the local rulers still could rule in their feudal system that the CPC established a temporal office for Tibetan affairs, the “Preparatory Committee for the Autonomous Region of Tibet” to implement first communist ideas, although not interfering in the local system and their rulers. The feudal system was abolished in Qinghai under the Ma Clique, and eventually abolished in Xikang as well, and thus Tibetans in TAR strongly wished to live an equal life rather than conservative feudalism. The pro-aristocratical Gelug school and the anti-aristocratical Rimê movement (རིམེ་མེད་ ; 利美运动) now stood against each other as never before. Of course, the parts of the aristocracy which was in favor for equality probably tried to use the opportunity to stay in power by adopting the people’s will, however a resistance against Tibetan aristocracy was about to break out. In 1959, the Tibetans started a rebellion against their own clerics to abolish the feudal system. As a result, most Tibetan clerics and influential aristocrats had to go to India, since they were chased away from the local people. The Chinese army eventually saw this chance to get sympathy and supported the Tibetans to chase away their masters who enslaved them before. Tibet now was liberated by the Chinese, and in 1965, the TAR was formally established.

Notes:

1. Wang Jiawei; Nyima Gyaincain: The Historical Status of China’s Tibet, 2000, p. 83
2. Wang (2000), p. 84
3. Wang (2000), p. 89
4. Wang (2000), p. 99
5. Wang (2000), p.113
6. Wang (2000), p.114

7. Wang (2000), p.116
8. Richardson, Hugh E.: Tibet and its History, Boston 1984, pp. 134-136
9. compare Кычанов Е.И.; Мельниченко Б.Н.: История Тибета с древнейших времен до наших дней, Москва 2005, стр. 156
10. Sun Hongkai: On the Qiangic branch of the Tibeto-Burman languages, in: Languages and linguistics Vol. 2 no.1, 2001, pp. 157-181

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