

# **An Overview of Tibetan History, Part 7:**

## **The Battle of Qamdo and the Sino-Indian wars**

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While Central and West Tibet formed one province called “Tibet” within China in the Qing dynasty and kept its ties to China during the civil war, and while Amdo was deeply integrated into China in its Qinghai province without interruption, one group was about to face a change: The Kham Tibetans. The Kham areas in Sichuan were part of China even before Tibet joined China in the 1720s, but the small kingdoms and principalities gained autonomy. During Republican China this was about to change. The Guomindang tried to impose the ‘Three principles of the People’ (三民主义) on Xikang. Therefore, Khesar Gyeltsen realised the Xikang idea that was more theoretical than practical before. So let’s focus on the area once again. This time, let’s take a look at the history of Kham after the Dalai Lama failed to conquer Qinghai and Sichuan in 1930.

In 1932, the Chinese warlord Liu Wenhui from Sichuan signed a treaty with the local Khampa leaders, although Kham was formally part of an own province called Xikang. The treaty split up Kham in two regions: West Kham and East Kham. The Western Kham areas gained Tibetan autonomy and are nowadays part of Tibet Province, the Eastern Kham area remained in Sichuan and was directly governed by China. But this division led to dissatisfaction, since the Kham tribes in Western Kham did not want to be governed under the autonomy led by the Dalai Lama. Thus, a rebellion broke out as the Pandatsang family did not want to be governed by the Dalai Lama, and the family therefore had to fight against Tibetan military forces, the Sichuan clique army under Liu Wenhui and the communist forces, making Kham a melting pot. Foreign powers were aware that Kham area was probably the most controversial spot in whole China, since the region was breaking apart.

At the same time, the Tibet Improvement Party was gaining popularity, a party which was anti-feudal and anti-religious, but at the same time pro-Chinese. The party was more or less a Tibetan puppy party used by the Guomindang to weaken the Communists that were receiving more and more favor in Tibet. The reason was evident: the Tibetans did not like to be ruled by feudal powers, but instead wished to live equally. The communists were very popular, while the Guomindang was not favored by the Tibetans since they were too nationalist. Therefore, the Tibet Improvement Party was founded to compete with the communists, but at the same

time the Tibet Improvement Party adopted the nationalist ideology of the Guomindang. For this reason, the Tibet Improvement Party was condemned to fail from the beginning. The communists soon could win all the sympathy in Qinghai's Tibetan population and the population of Tibet. Just one area remained problematic, the Kham area. While many of Central and West Tibet's kingdoms were not only hostile to each other, but very poor and outdated, the Kham kingdoms of Litang and Dêgê seemingly were not that egoistic, and the common people probably had a lot of profit and far better living conditions. Both kingdoms were against the Gelug school and the Dalai Lama and thus became the center of the Rime movement (a joint religious movement against Gelug suppression). On the other hand, there were many Gelug monasteries in Western Sichuan that tried to gain more and more influence, probably spreading anti-Chinese sentiments.

After the PRC was founded and the Tibetan areas as well as Qinghai voluntarily became part of China, some Kham kingdoms – especially Dêgê and Litang – refused and unlike other feudal masters who could not find support in the population, people in these two Kham kingdoms seemingly supported the kings. According to Western sources, a resistance group was formed to “liberate” Tibet, but in fact this is not completely true. Indeed, a resistance group was founded in Dêgê and Litang fighting for the independence of Kham. However, they never fought for Tibet's independence, since the Kham Tibetans don't identify themselves with the Tibetans in Tibet at all. And as we can learn from the 1934 rebellion in West Kham, the Khampas never wanted to join Tibet at all. However, it is assumed that this small and unimportant resistance group received aid from the USA. The latter one hoped to destabilize China in its weakest point. But also Great Britain had an interest in destabilizing the area before losing its colony India. And later, India had an interest in destabilizing the area after Indian socialism failed and the Indian high classes wanted to save their seats. The resistance group lost its importance in Kham after the Battle of Qamdo and they left for Nepal where they continued with very small guerilla actions supported by the CIA until the 1970s. The Americans stopped their support after the realignment of Chinese-American relations between Mao Zedong and Nixon.

During the battle in Qamdo (October 6 – October 19, 1950), prisoners of war were treated very well by Chinese forces and after giving away their arms they could go back to their homes. Civilians were not attacked.

The commander-in-chief of Tibetan forces Ngapoi Ngawang Jigmê capitulated in Qamdo avoiding bloody war actions and even changed his view from a Pro-Tibetan to a Pro-Chinese, becoming one of the most important Chinese politicians of Tibetan ethnicity from the

beginning. The revolt of the common people against the Tibetan aristocracy and the complete integration into China until 1959 was already described in my last article. However, I want to repeat that the 1959 uprising was not a Tibetan uprising against the Chinese, but a Tibetan uprising against the Tibetan aristocracy in favor for the Chinese. As a result of the uprising, the aristocracy had to leave the country and most stayed in India. India was aware that China is a more powerful country than India and high classes in India feared that uprisings for more equality of opportunity could take place in India, too. Therefore, India saw a chance to use the so called "Tibet Question" to destabilize China. It was in India's interest that the border of China would be further away, and Tibet as land in between would be perfect for the Indians. But as the Tibetans decided to stay in China, the newly arrived Tibetan aristocracy that was chased away by the own population established a de facto new caste often labeled as exiled people. They organised under the Dalai Lama in a pseudo-government that has no importance at all, even for many Tibetans living outside China.

A new problem came up however. The Indian government still occupied Ladakh and Tawang. In 1962, China tried to get the areas back to reunite the Tibetans. In the end of October 1962, the Sino-Indian War started. One month later China declared a ceasefire, while India de facto accepted it. Both countries refused to talk to each other, therefore peace talks had to be done through other countries. As a result, India sought closer contact to the Soviet Union (leading to the effect that the myth of Tibetan independence is very widespread in Russia until today), while China allied with Pakistan – the enemy of India. This is no surprise, since China feared that both, the Soviet Union and India could try to expand to China, at the same time, the United States wanted to destroy Chinese communism, but the USA later allied with China, since China was hostile to the Soviet Union and as the well known proverb says "the enemy of your enemy is your friend", and therefore the Americans were willing to accept Chinese communism rather than fighting against it.

The Sino-Indian War in South Tibet was a sign of a conflict of two battling super-powers and while the Soviet Union later fell down, China came to a rise being the most important world power today, while India still has to struggle with its own system.

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