

FEATURE

The Truth About Tibet

From 300 years: China-Tibet history to separate the facts from the fiction

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and A Description of Tibetan Society and its Development

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I-Yao Shen has lived in the U.S. for 50 years with a good will for both the U.S. and China, and cares deeply about the U.S.-China relations. The “Tibetan Independence” question involves territorial and sovereignty issues, and requires an in-depth explanation on China-Tibet history. He has been studying the historical China-Tibet relations, and in autumn last year, he and his wife spent a week in Tibet, China, for further understanding.

They went to Lhasa, the Capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region: the site of Gaxag, the former local government of Tibet, home to the Potala Palace (winter palace) and the Norbu Lingka (summer palace) of Dalai Lama, and the well-known Jokhang Monastery. They went to Zetang, the cradle of traditional Tibetan culture and to Gyangze, at 213 km from the Sino-Indian border, is the only passageway from Lhasa to India. They went 90 km west to Xigaze, the site of Tashilhunpo Monastery - the residence of Panchen Lama (Erdeni). Its administrative organ is the Kampus Assembly, which was the subject to Gaxag (Dalai Lama).

But, Panchen Lama has had equal power with Dalai Lama during the reigns of Emperors Yongzhen and Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), and since the peaceful liberation of Tibet in 1951.

For 3 days in Lhasa, they talked to Tibetans, and to a Tibet leader for 3 hours.

Historical China-Tibet Relation

In discussing the Tibetan question, the historical perspective plays a central role. Many people in the West discuss the historical China-Tibet relation only after 1950. In fact, China has had a close relationship with Tibet for more than 1,300 years, which was developed in two stages:

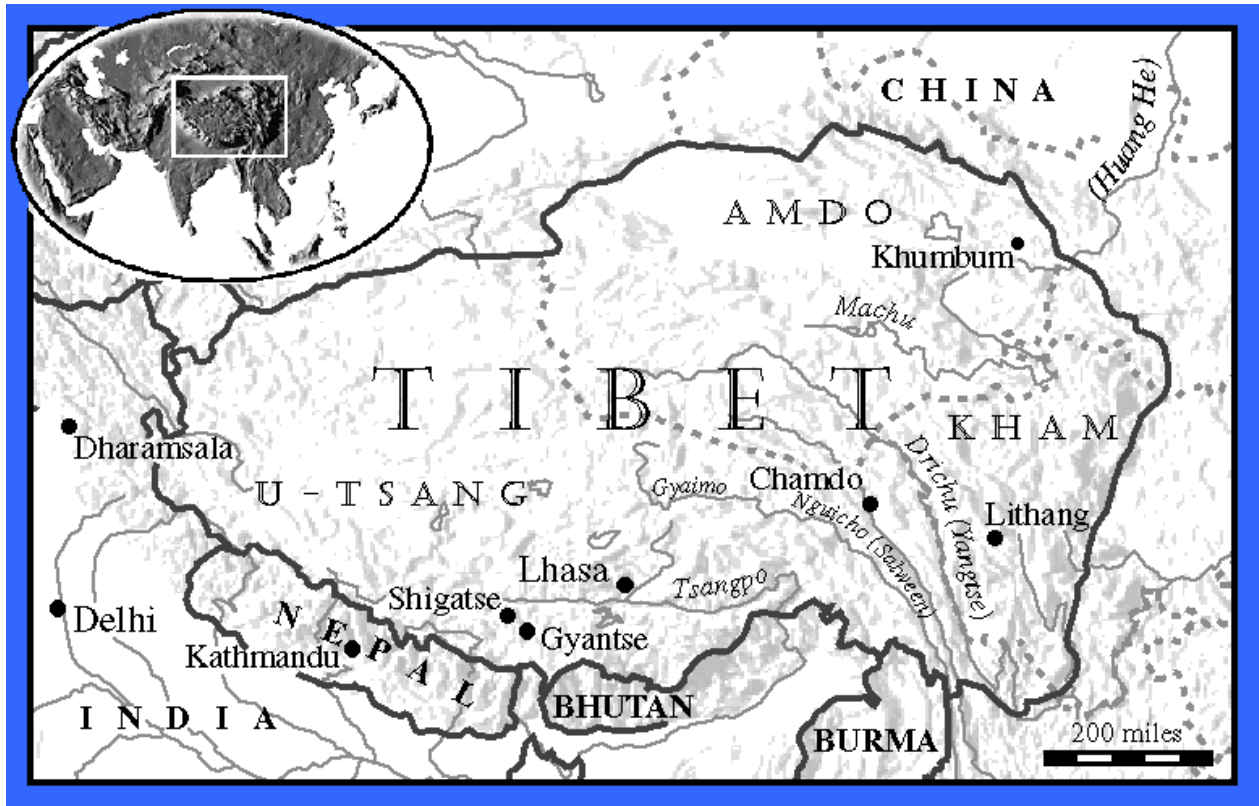
The first stage extends over 200 years from early Tang Dynasty (618-907) to the collapse of the Tubo Kingdom (including Tibet), History show that Tang Dynasty and the Tubo kingdom exchanged envoys 142 times between 634 and 851: 51 envoys dispatched by the Tang

and 91 by the Tubo, In 641, Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty sent “Princess Wencheng” to Tibet in a marriage to the Tubo King Songtsan Gambo, This event is recorded in a fresco (Wall painting) in the Potola Palace, and is printed on the Tang-Tubo Peace Alliance Tablet in front of the Jokhang Monastery in 823. In the Jokhang Monastery, there is a statue of Sakyamuni (Buddhism’s Founder) which Princess Wencheng brought to Tibet as a part of her dowry.

The second stage extends over 700 years since the 13th century when Tibet remained as a part of China, After the downfall of the Tubo



Tashilhunpo Monastery



Kingdom, Tibet was divided for 400 years until the Yuan (CQ, Mongol) Dynasty (1271-1368), when Tibet pledged allegiance to China. From then on, Tibet was incorporated into the map of China. In the archives of the Tibet Autonomous Region, there are many records from the Yuan Dynasty, including imperial edicts written in Parba (a Tibetan language) and Mongolian scripts, religious documents written by State Tutors in ancient Tibetan language, and notices of Pacification Commissioners. These records show that Tibet has been a part of China at least since 1271,

During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Emperor Chengzu and ensuing emperors granted honorific titles to the leaders of various sects of Tibet Buddhism. Currently, memorial tablets to Ming emperors are well preserved in some Tibetan lamaseries. In Tibet, there are more than 10,000 volumes of records from the Ming Dynasty. The #1 Historical Archive of China has a collection of 3,000 volumes such records. From these records, one sees that the Ming Dynasty

followed the Yuan Dynasty's practice in exercising sovereignty over Tibet,

The Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) dispatched more than 100 High Commissioners to Tibet. They were charged with appointing and dismissing local government officials, presiding over activities and ceremonies held by the Dalai Lama, Panchen Lama, and other Living Buddhas. In 1791, when the Qing troops routed the Korgas who invaded Tibet, the Qing Imperial court promulgated the 29-articles of Ordinance for the more efficient governing of Tibet. That Ordinance was followed in Tibet until the Democratic Reform in Tibet in 1959. All records of the Qing Dynasty totaling 700,000 volumes show that Tibet was a part of China.

When the Republic of China (ROC) was founded in 1911, the central government declared that China is a republic of various ethnic groups with five major ones: Han, Manchu, Mongolian, Hui and Tibetan. The ROC promulgated the Provisional Constitution, stating that Tibet is a part of Chinese territory. There are

many records from the Republic of China (1911-1949) and since 1950's, These records include the original copies of the 17- article Agreement (1951) of the central government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the local government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet in both Han Chinese and Tibetan language.

The continuous China-Tibet history since the beginning of Tang Dynasty (618 CE) and the incorporation of the Yuan Dynasty (1271) demonstrates that Tibet has been a part of China for at least 700 years and likely much longer.

The "Larger Tibetan Area" Myth

Tibetan is one of the 56 ethnic groups living in China. The Tibetan plateau is a strategic barrier in the southwest China, with an area of one-eighth of the Chinese territory. Tibetans are found not only in Tibet Autonomous Region, but also in Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan provinces where non-Tibetans are the majority residents. Some people outside China call areas inhabited by the Tibetans as the "Larger Tibetan Area". Historically, however, there never was such a "larger Tibetan area". The so-called "Outer Tibet (Tibetan residence outside Tibet)" has never been a part of Tibet.

Beginning in the 13th century, the Yuan and Ming central government exercised separate rules over Tibet and Outer Tibet. In the Qing Dynasty, the central government established administrative units in Outer Tibet. Under the ROC, Outer Tibet was under the rules of respective provinces where Tibetans are minority residents. Under the PRC, the provincial administrative units were maintained in the main, but 10 Tibetan Nationality Autonomous Counties were added in the Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu and Yunnan provinces.

For Chinese people, Tibetans included, "Tibetan Independence is out of question." The larger Tibetan Area is a new myth.

Tibetan Independence Is a Banner to Split China

The Tibetan issue was a leftover from the colonialist era, and a byproduct of the cold war. After the Opium War (Britain's invasion of China in 1840-42), colonialist began to invade Tibet. Since the mid-19th century, Britain gradually gained the control of states in the Himalayan area, and moved northward. On the excuse of border dispute, Britain flagrantly invaded Tibet in 1888, and forced the signing of the Anglo-Chinese Convention, on March 17, 1890, relating the protection of Zemanxion, requesting, three years later, to open Yadong as a trading port and to occupy Zemanxion as a subordinate state.

In 1904, British troops invaded Tibet once more. They attacked Gynagze and seized Lhasa, forcing the local government of Tibet to sign the treaty between China and Britain, although tacitly recognizing Chinese sovereignty over Tibet, After the Chinese Revolution of 1911, Britain openly raised the Banner of "Tibetan Independence" in 1913, In 1924, 1941, 1947 and 1949, Britain and other colonialists plotted "Tibetan Independence" activities in a futile attempt to split China.

From the 1950s to 1970s, the CIA urged and aided the 14th Dalai Lama in exile in conducting sabotage activities. This was designed to tear apart Chinese territory. It trained Tibetan guerrillas in Colorado, and airlifted weapons into Tibet, But nothing significant was achieved. In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, and the cold war was brought to an end. Nonetheless, the cold war concepts still haunt the mind of people of the McCarthy (1950s) era. As a result, Tibetan-Independence and the Tibetan issue, like a ghost, appear now and then.

History Can Not Be Altered in Tibet

While Tibet Buddhist monasteries glisten, the lingering Tibetan issue has lackluster sales. On October 13, 1997, the US magazine Newsweek carried a lengthy interview with the 14th Dalai Lama. In that interview, Dalai Lama, realizing that total independence is not possible, demanded a dialogue with the central government and expressed his wish of going back to Tibet. In

November 1997, President Jiang Zemin, answering a question on this demand during his lecture at Harvard University, said the 14th Dalai Lama must publicly recognize Tibet as an integral part of China, publicly announce his giving-up of Tibetan Independence and stop conducting all activities geared to split the motherland. As a matter of record, the 14th Dalai Lama has never done so to date.

Earlier on October 29, when the Tibetan issue was mentioned at a White House press conference after a meeting with President Jiang, President Bill Clinton said that the United States holds no political goals in issues concerning the Tibetans, Tibetan Buddhism and the Dalai Lama, The constructive negotiation between the two countries is built up on one promise that the United States will not tear Tibet away from China, The United States merely wished to do certain coordinating work for all on issues concerning religious freedom in Tibet and preservation of the special culture of Tibet.

Finally, let's have a look at the activities of the 14th Dalai Lama and his clique in the United States. With foreign support, the 14th Dalai Lama has set up two offices in Washington, D.C. and New York city in the name of international aid-Tibet movement. They use religion as a banner to camouflage their political activities, publish journals, hold press conferences, monitor events in Congress, and exert pressure on the Clinton Administration. Through 2-years efforts, the US State Department announced on October 31,1997, the establishment of a Tibetan affairs special coordinator.

The 14th Dalai Lama, exiled overseas for 40 years, has little knowledge of major changes in Tibet: Tibetan slaves and serfs, formerly groaning under his rule, have become free people, and the political power, which he used to govern Tibet, has been replaced by the people's government of Tibet. How can he go back without political power and what could he do if

he does? Doesn't he know the changes already occurred cannot be reversed?

Tibet's Population

It has been said that more than 1 million Tibetans have been killed after 1951. This is not supported by the population statistics in Tibet. In 1953, China conducted its first census. At that time, the local government of Tibet headed by the Dalai Lama claimed to have 1 million people in Tibet. Since then, populations in Tibet has increased to 1.251 million in 1964 (1.209 million Tibetans or 96.63% of the total), to 2.196 million in 1982 (2.096 million Tibetans or 95.4% of the total), and to 2.458 million in 1996 (2.377 million Tibetans or 96.7% of the total). Based on my understanding, the above figures do not include the transitory populations and troops of the People's Liberation Army stationed in Tibet.

Yet, historical records show that from the Tang Dynasty to 1950, the Tibet population decreased due to the spread of Tibetan Buddhism which called for each family to supply members to become monks or nuns with a vow of celibacy. Since the 16th century, monks and nuns had comprised 25% of the Tibetan population. The remainder were serfs and slaves who were too poor to raise many children. This is why the Tibetan population decreased by 8 million from the Tang to Qing Dynasties, and by an additional 800,000 from the Qing Dynasty to 1950.

Since 1950, the Tibetan population has been on the increase for many reasons. First, the emancipated Tibetan serfs and slaves began earning money for their labor, which led to a better quality of life with free medical care. Thus, the life span of Tibetans has increased from 36 in 1951 to 65 at present. Recently, the Tibetan annual income has registered a per-capita increase of 8.6%. Now, 93% of the farmers and herders, residing in the Lhasa suburbs, have pensions, and they are not encouraged to practice family planning.

After 1984, Tibetan cadres, workers, and urban residents were encouraged to have two children, and there is no coercion or forced

abortion. People of the Han ethnicity in Tibet mostly reside in the cities. They are teachers, medical doctors, technical personnel and business people.

Tibetan's Buddhism

As Buddhism spread into Tibet from India, it adopted a unique Tibetan form, a religious administration with feudal serfdom. Monasteries (monks and nuns) mentally enslaved serfs, with total despair in reality and only hope in the next life. In 1409, Zongkapa created the Grand Summons Ceremony at the Jokhang Monastery in Lhasa. The first Dalai and Panchen Lamas were disciples of Zongkapa. Afterwards, Gandain, Zhaibung and Sera monasteries were built to form the base for the Yellow Sect. From Tibet, the Yellow Sect spread to Qinghai and Mongolia in China, as the #1 sect of the Tibetan Buddhism.

With the support of Gusher Khan, the fifth Dalai Lama gained his political power in 1642. Later, he won honorific title from the Qing Dynasty as the leader of the religious administration to rule Tibet. Monasteries, nobilities and local Tibetan government, the three major forces in Tibet, collaborated under the rules of Tibetan Buddhism in reducing people into slaves and serfs. Although the rules have been abolished for more than 40 years, people still have not gotten rid of these invisible shackles which are partially responsible for the general hardship and backwardness of the Tibetans.

In 1950, a year before the "peaceful liberation" of Tibet, there were 300,000 monks and nuns (25% of 1.2 million people). In 1996, there were 46,000 monks and nuns (about 2% of 2.45 million people). This decrease of monks and nuns are brought about by major changes in social conditions. After 1951, families are no longer forced to provide candidates to be monks and nuns. People enjoy the new freedom to choose their own beliefs and to engage in productive activities. The Potola Palace, and Jokhang, Zhaibung and Sera Monasteries, are open to everyone.

During the chaotic "cultural revolution (1966-76)", many temples in China, including Tibet, suffered damages. In the past 20 years, the government earmarked several hundred million yuans for the renovation of religious sites. By 1997, about 1,800 sites had been renovated, including the Potola Palace and the Samye, Gandain, Tashihungpo and Palkor monasteries, all listed as major cultural relics under special protection.

Infrastructures

Over the past 40 years, the central government has invested about 20 billion yuan to undertake infrastructural constructions in Tibet. In 1965, there were over 80 industrial enterprises in Tibet. They included construction, power generation, auto-repair, tanning, and borax and coal mining. At present, it gives an annual allocation of 1 billion yuan, the highest figure per capita share in the country.

Prior to 1951, no highways in its true sense existed in Tibet. Now there are 22,500 km of highways. Before 1951, no farm machinery and chemical fertilizer were used. Now, large farmlands and grasslands have been created and tourists are amazed to see tractors plowing the fields. After 1980, farmers are free from centralized purchase and agricultural taxes. Tibet has 3,100-3,400 hours of sunshine annually. In early 1990, China's largest solar energy station was built in Tibet. In many places, solar energy lamps have replaced traditional butter lamps.

In 1994, to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Founding of the Tibet Autonomous Region, the central government in Beijing mobilized the entire country to aid 62 construction projects in Tibet with a total investment of 2.38 billion yuan. By 1996, 56 projects had been completed with a total investment surpassing the budget to reach 3.6 billion yuan.

Education in Tibet

Prior to 1950, Tibet had official and private schools attended to by some 2,000 monks and children of the nobility. In 1950-90, the

central government spent 1.1 billion yuan for Tibetan education: the number of illiterates and semi-illiterates dropped from 95% to 44%; 40,000 children graduated from high schools and polytechnic secondary schools; and 17,000 graduated from colleges and universities. For 1990, there were 157,000 students in primary school, 21,300 in middle school, and 5,000 in high school and vocational school.

Now, there are four universities, 15 polytechnic secondary schools, 63 middle schools, and 2,474 primary schools, boarding schools for children from pastoral and farming areas, and Tibetan language schools in the hinterland. The Tibet Autonomous Region practices free education, supplemented by financial allowances and scholarships. Tibetan students are given priority in entering university and colleges. In 1992, there were 12,300 teachers in Tibet: 76% of them were of Tibetan and other ethnic groups, and the remaining 24% were of the Han ethnicity.

Both Tibetan and Chinese languages are taught in school. In primary schools, students study mainly Tibetan, but some schools emphasize both Tibetan and Chinese. In the middle schools, students study mainly Chinese, but are also taught in Tibetan in some lessons. In universities and colleges, many lessons are taught in Chinese, because Tibetan language lacks natural science terms.

Tibetan Culture

After 1950, Tibetan traditions and customs are upheld and respected. Most Tibetans retain their traditional costumes, diet and housing style. They celebrate their traditional festivals such as the Tibetan New Year, the Shoton (Sour Milk Drinking) festival, the Butter Lamp festival, as well as customs and habits associated with religion in wedding or funeral ceremonies.

The Potola Palace, Yungbolhakang Palace and monasteries of Jokhang, Zhaibung, Palkor, Tashilhunpo and Xalhu have been repaired and listed as major state cultural sites subject to special protection. Tibetan classics

have been reprinted for distribution. Some 200 Tibetan classics totaling more than 1 million volumes have been issued. King Gesar, a Tibetan epic longer than the works of Homer, has been listed as a major research project and is being collected for publication.

Research into Tibetan Buddhism gets special attention. After the Tibetan Buddhist College was created in 1983, China Tibetan Language Senior Buddhist Institute was opened in Beijing. Close to 500 students, under the guidance of the noted Living Buddhas and scholars, study Buddhist sutras, classics, and history on religion. The Tibetan Tripitaka: Gangyur created in the 13th century, has been reprinted for recitation in various monasteries in Tibet. Dangyur, a supplement to Gangyur, was created in the mid-14th century. It was collected by the Dege Sutra Printing House and efforts are being made to reproduce it for public distribution.

To inherit and carry forward the 3,000 years old tradition of Tibet medicine, the central (Chinese) government has created the Tibetan Medicine College and the Tibetan Medicine University. In 1984, the central government allocated close to 10 million yuan to build the Tibet Archive Building covering 30,000 square meters. In 1996, the Tibet Library was built, ending a situation in which no modern library existed in Tibet. In 1986, 1991 and 1997, Tibet Symposiums were held with a view for researching into the development of Tibetan history and culture. Scholars from all over the world attended those Symposiums.

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