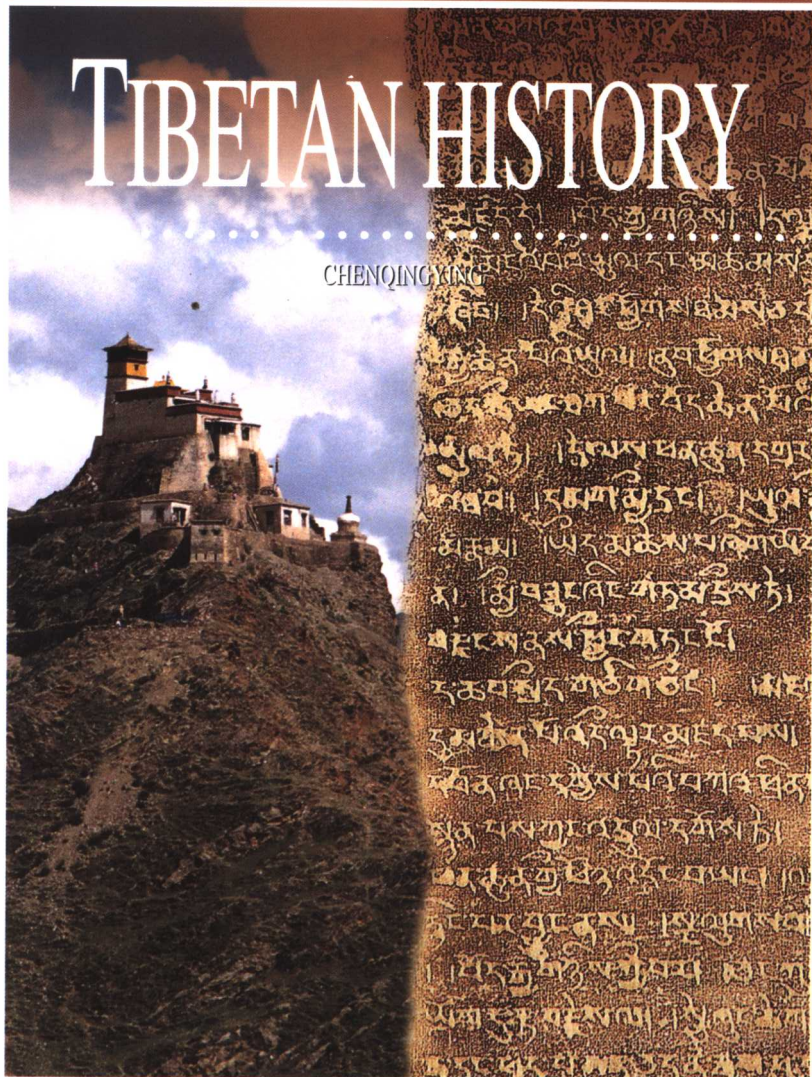


Series of Basic Information of Tibet of China

TIBETAN HISTORY

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Tibet, formally known as the Tibet Autonomous Region, enjoys ethnic regional autonomy within the People's Republic of China while also being a province-level autonomous region. It covers an area of 1,200,000 square kilometers. According to data from the fifth national census, it has a population of 2,620,000, among which over 95 percent belong to the Tibetan race. Among other ethnic groups represented are the Han, Hui, Menba, Luoba, Naxi and the Nu.

The region lies at an average elevation of over 4000 meters, and forms the main part of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, popularly known as the 'Roof of the World'. From north to south on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau stand four huge mountain ranges stretching from west to east, namely Mt A'erjin-the Qilian Mountains, Mt Kunlun-the Bayan Har mountains, Mt Karakoram-the Tanggula mountains, and the Himalayas. These ranges broaden and expand in the middle and come together at each end, so that, on a topographic map, the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau forms a big bag with both ends tied and the middle bulging with goods. Meanwhile, on the inner part of the plateau, the platforms located between the mountain ranges running roughly parallel to one another in an east-west direction, seem to form many small bags. The Tibet Autonomous Region occupies over half of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau on its southwest side. Its topography, with three huge mountains standing roughly parallel to one another from north to south - namely, Karakoram, Tanggula and Himalayan ranges - forms three terraces higher in the northwest and lower in the southeast. While the topography is complex, the area can be divided into



Yongbo Lhakang, the first palace in Tibet.

Prehistory before the Tubo Kingdom



Beautiful scenery in Tibet.

three distinct natural zones:

1. The North Tibet Plateau, accounting for two-thirds of the region and with an average elevation of over 4,500m, apart from several rivers in the southwest corner, most of its rivers are continental ones that form many lakes on the plateau;

2. The valley of the Yarlung Zangbo River, with an average elevation of about 3,500m, and the rivers that join it as it runs from west to east;

3. High Mountains and Deep Valleys in the east, from the great turning point of the Yarlung Zangbo River to the Jinsha River, including part of the Hengduan Mountains, which run east-west and then north-south. It has an average elevation under 3,500m and the topography is higher in the north and lower in the south, with mountain ranges and rivers running from north to east.

On the southern edge of the Tibet Autonomous Region stand the Himalayas, the largest and highest mountains in the world. The highest peak of all is Mt Qomolangma (better known around the world as Mt. Everest), surrounded by many other peaks above 8,000m. The terrain on the southern foot of the Himalayas declines sharply to the Ganges Plain of India, featuring a warm and humid climate. Hence, there is a great disparity in climate and climatic belts between the northern and southern foothills of the mountain. Meanwhile, on the west, north and east, the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau borders the Pamirs, the Loess Plateau, the Sichuan Basin, and the Yungui Plateau, thus forming a more gradual transition of climate and climatic belts. Because of its high altitude, and with the warm and wet air currents from the Indian Ocean being blocked by the Himalayas, the climate of the Tibet Plateau is cold and dry. For instance, in the Lhasa area, the average January temperature is -2.2 degrees, and the average July temperature is 15.4; In the Nagou area, the average temperature in January is -13.9 degrees, and the average temperature in July is 8.9. The yearly average temperature of most areas of Tibet is below 10 degrees, while the average temperatures and peak temperatures for the hottest month in

Lhasa and Xigaze are 10-15 degrees centigrade lower than that in Chongqing, Wuhan and Shanghai, which are on about the same latitude. The Qinghai-Tibet Plateau has a long winter and, strictly speaking, no summer. The frost-free season is very short: In the Lhasa and Xigaze areas, these total between 120 and 180 days, but in the Nagou area there are only about 60-80 days. The total number of days in which the yearly average temperature remains below zero degrees centigrade is 173.3 days in the Lhasa area, 189.7 days in the Xigaze area and 276.9 days in the Nagou area. At the other extreme, there are less than 50 days each year when the temperature can be expected to exceed 10 degrees in most areas. Only few areas have higher temperatures, but even there, readings above 10 degrees are likely on no more than 180 days. Tibet receives less precipitation and most of its annual rainfall is concentrated in July and August. For example, in Lhasa, the annual precipitation is 453.9 millimeters; in Gar Town of the Ngari area 60.4 millimeters; in the Nagou area 406.2 millimeters. In winter and spring there are many snowstorms, while summer and autumn see many hail, rain and thunderstorms. As far as the Nagou area is concerned, on average there are more than 85 days of thunder and rainstorms, and over 35 days of hailstorms each year. At the same time, Tibet is subjected to strong winds: the number of days with gales (above level eight) in Lhasa is 32.4; in the Xigaze areas it is 59.3, while in pasture regions of Nagou and Ngari, it varies from 100 to 150 days. It even reaches about 200 days in some very exposed places. On the other hand, Tibet's vegetation zones also change with altitude, and the high mountains may have a whole series of climates similar to those found in different latitudes. Moving from low elevation to high elevation, the mountain vegetation usually shifts in a regular pattern: tropical forest, deciduous forest, grassland, pine forest, and alpine scrub above the tree line, with barren rock at highest altitudes. Above the snowline, high and steep mountains are covered with snow and ice all the year round, forming large areas of glaciers, which is similar to the spectacular view at the two poles of the earth.



Bronze arrows unearthed from Qoigong relics site.



Color-glazed Joint pottery unearthed from Karo relics site.

Viewed overall, most Tibetan areas are rocky desert and grassland, which is not suited to growing crops. Only in a few deep valleys along rivers is it possible to develop high-altitude agriculture, thanks to warm and mild weather, more hours of daylight, fertile soil and plenty of irrigation. Due to the limited areas to grow crops and the volatile climate, production is low, with only one harvest a year. What's more, the total area of farmland only amounts to about 270,000 hectares, and most areas in Tibet are only suited to the development of highland pasture. However, despite the vast area of highland pasture in Tibet, only a limited number of areas can be effectively used. Other disadvantageous aspects also affect animal husbandry, such as brief growing seasons, low production of grass, more hazardous climate with snowstorms and so on. As the result, it is difficult for the various ethnic groups in Tibet to live and multiply. Only after thousands, even millions of years of hard struggle with the fierce natural conditions have they come to develop and grow to today's scale and effect.

Since the middle of the 20th century, a series of relics of ancient inhabitants in Tibet have been discovered in various places, and some of them can date back to the Old Stone Age or the New Stone Age, which is evidence that the Tibet Plateau was inhabited from very ancient times. Among these relics, the Karo Relics in the Qamdo areas and the Qukong Relics in the northern suburbs of Lhasa are of great importance. The Karo Relics cover an area of 10,000 square meters. The articles excavated include: over 7,000 pieces of large-scale stoneware, such as shovels, axes, pickaxes, ploughs as well as stone scrapers, stone cutters and so on; over 400 tools made of bone such as drills, needles and so on; more than 20,000 potsherds, with red, yellow, gray, black four colors and various porcelain wares. In addition, the skeletons of animals including pigs and antelopes, large quantities of maize, as well as the remains of houses, such as stone walls, kitchens, kang (a heated brick bed) were also excavated. Archeologists at work in Tibet have reported that these relics can trace their origins back 4,000 years, provid-

ing evidence that, at that time, some parts of the Tibetan species had entered an area of settlement, with their production activities transferring from hunting into farming and breeding. Archeologists also embrace the view that the Karo Relics demonstrate the existence of a primitive society lasting at least a thousand years. The Karo finds have a roughly similar evolutionary level with the Majiayao, Bansha and Machang cultural relics, with similar culture contents (Karo Relics in the Qamdo Area, Culture Relics PublishingHouse, 1985; Hou Shizhu: A Guideline to Tibetan Archeology, Tibetan People's PublishingHouse). With regard to the Qukong Relics of Lhasa, there were two slate graves, a number of kang, and about a million articles of stoneware. Some tools made of bone, such as drills, needles and so on, were also discovered. A bone needle deserves special mention. It has a similar structure in theory to modern needles of sewing machines: with an eye in the pinpoint, not at the end of the needle. The particular needle was the first to have been discovered among the pre-historic relics in the country. In regard to porcelain, there were one-ear wares, two-ear wares, with polished surfaces and various geometric decorations. In addition, two-shouldered stone shovels and millstones were also excavated, showing that agricultural economic activities had emerged in the Lhasa areas as early as 4,000 years ago. (Wang Renxiang: Inhabitants in the New Stone Age in the Valley of Lhasa River: Accounts of the Qokong Relics of Lhasa, Tibetan Research, Vol.4, 1990)

A number of Tibetan sources trace the origin of human beings in the region back to the prehistoric inhabitants. Some documents of the Bon religion, the indigenous religion of Tibet, state that the universe originated from a white egg and a black egg, both of which evolved from the five essential elements. Shiba Sambo Benchi, the ancestor of human beings, was born from the core of the black egg. Then, the descendants of Shiba Sambo Benchi, the respective gods of heaven and earth, gave birth to what became human beings. Other legends assert the Tibetan race was born from the combination of monkeys and the spirit of a rock, and the earliest hu-



Cutting tools left in the Old Stone Age, collected from Ritu County.



All kinds of stone tools of the New Stone Age, unearthened from the Karo Relics site in Qamdo.

man beings lived near Zedam on the Yarlung Zangbo River, which stemmed from a vague memory of the ancient people that their ancestors came from woods and forests. The Tibetan editions of *Origins and Doctrines of Different Religions* by Tiwu and *A Happy Feast of Sages* have it that, before the emergence of human beings, there were ten or twelve non-humans who ruled over Tibet, which was called the place of "Bod-Khams". The word "Bod-pa", which was the name of the Tibetan race for ages, apparently evolved from "Bod-Khams", the name for ancient Tibet. Some other ethnic groups living near the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, such as the Qiang, Naxi and Pumi, held for centuries that their ancestors came from the central belt of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, and this was supported by their legends and myths. Based on archeological discoveries, folk legends and myths, as well as analysis of the natural environment on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, we find support for the belief that the earliest places where ancient people of the plateau lived was around the woods along the middle and lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River. Later with their ability to begin to use fire, to resist stronger wild beasts, as well as a wider diet, the ancient human beings began to spread and live along various rivers, such as the Yarlung Zangbo, the Lhasa River, the Nyamchu River, the Nyiyam River and the Yarlung River, and it was here that the early stages of farm culture developed, including animal breeding in the valleys. But, only when the farm culture developed to the extent that ancient people could raise groups of wild animals, including domesticating wild horses and taming wolves to become hunting dogs, was large-scale animal husbandry able to develop in the vast grasslands. With the improvement of herdsmen's physique mainly through eating cheese and meat, they had the ability to cope with the fierce conditions imposed by long treks that became necessary as the growing number of animals needed new and larger grassland. Thus, the nomadic tribes migrated toward larger areas. Some tribes started from the North Tibet Plateau, tramped over Mt Tanggula to reach the sources of the Yangtze and Huanghe rivers. On the vast grasslands around Qinghai

Lake, various tribal unions formed, and they continued to expand eastward to the Loess Plateau, where they came into contact and associated with the Huaxia Tribe living on the middle and lower reaches of the Huanghe River. They are the so-called "Qiang people" and the "West Qiang Tribe" in Chinese historical records. Chinese historical sources describe the "Qiang people" as Western herdsman, the actual meaning of which was left to further research. The Qiang tribe expanded eastward and joined the Han race in the course of historical development, while the other branch that traveled southwards, crossed over the Hengduan Mountains, and entered the Yungui Plateau; some went even farther, to Burma, forming series of ethnic groups of the Tibetan-Burmese language family. Even today, from linguistic similarities, we can see their relative relationship. With regard to the agricultural and nomadic tribes left on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, they formed the Tibetan race after the unification of the Tubo kingdom during the time of China's Tang Dynasty. The historical origins of the Qiang and Tibetan races is perhaps as Professor Fei Xiaotong has said: "Even if the Qiang people might not be regarded as the main source of the Tibetan people, it is undoubtedly that the Qiang people played a certain role in the formation of Tibetan race." (Fei Xiaotong: The Pluralistic and Unified Structure of Chinese Ethnic Groups, P28, The Central Ethnic University Publishing, 1999)

Just like the similar course of other nationalities worldwide, the ancient Tibetan people combined different clans and then formed different tribes according to their blood relationship. It also witnessed the successive appearance of the matrilineal the patriarchal commune. Historical Collection of Tibetan and the Han states that the ancestors of the Tibetans were divided into four clans named Se, Rmu, Stong and Ldong. The book also states that each clan had four branches, such as the Dbra, Vgru, Ldong, Lga, Dbas and Brdav, each further divided into many sub-branches. In Tibetan, the English word "surname" was called "rus-pa", which literally means ""bone" or "bone lineage", showing the close relationship between surname and blood



Bronze mirror with iron handle, unearthed from Goigong.



Fresco in Norbu Lingka: Nyatri Tsampo elected as chieftain by herdsmen of Yarlung Tribe.

relationship. In ancient times, with the development of production, the growth of population and the migration of clans, tribes split and then merged with others in new tribes through intermarriage, forming alliances and military conquest, as subjugated tribes pledged allegiance to the winners of the incessant wars for water resources, pastureland, farmland and subjects. At the same time, the polarization of rich and poor as well as the difference in social status came into being, as tribal leaders emerged as a noble class who handed their accumulated fortunes and powers on to their descendants. So, the big gap between "King" and "minister" as well as between "noble" and "populace" was gradually established. The captives of wars were treated as slaves and the conquered tribes offered tribute and taxes and provide sources of soldiers for further wars. Generally speaking, tribal unions experienced incessant disintegration and recombination, with new tribes rising following the decline of old ones.

In the 6th century, after thousands years of migration, development, disintegration and combination, a large number of tribal unions of different scale had been established in ancient Tibet. Among them there were the so-called "forty small kingdoms", which later became grouped as the "twelve small kingdoms". Tubo Historical Documents of the Dunhuang Edition lists the "twelve small kingdoms" as follows:

"Zhangzhung", located in the area of Ngari and Ladakh of western Tibet. Historical sources in Chinese call it "small and big Yangtong", one of tribes of western Qiang; "Nyamrochegar", "Norbo", "Nyamroshambo", distributed in Jamze in the Xigaze area; "Chomonamsung" in the area from Yadong to Sikkim; "Gyirojamen", "Yambochasung", "Lhongmoroyasung", which were distributed along the Lhasa River; "Yaroyuxi", "Eryubamgar", "Eiyuchuxi", which were distributed in the Shannan area; "Gongbozhena", located at Gongbo; "Nyamyudasung" in Nyambo; "Tabozhuxi", situated in Tagung; "Shenyuguyu" in the Samye area; "Sobiyasung", stretching from the North Tibet Plateau to the

Yushu and Gamze areas, also known as a big tribe of Western Qiang in Chinese historical records. In addition, the tribe of "Sheboye", the ancestor of the Tubo kingdom, which inhabited Qoingye in the Shannan Area, was one of the "twelve small kingdoms".

We have little information about the small tribes above except "Sheboye", for which there are more detailed historical legends. Legends have it that the first leader of the "Sheboye Tribe", Nyatri Tsampo, also forefather of the Tubo kingdom, came from heaven. Nyatri Tsampo descended upon a mountaintop called Sacred Mountain Yalashangbo, where he was greeted by a group of Tibetans. Rejoicing in their good fortune, these people raised him upon their shoulders and carried him off to be their ruler. And thus he became known as Nyatri Tsampo, which means Neck-Enthroned King in Tibetan. Records from the Bon religion upheld the belief that Nyatri Tsampo migrated from Bormi to Qoingye, and later became the leader of the tribe. As he was from Bormi, hence the name of the tribe he took control of was called "Sheboye" (Chabeicetanpingcho: Tibetan History, Tibetan Ancient Books Publishing, 1989). In the time of Nyatri Tsampo, the Palace of Yongbo Lhakang was established in the deep valley of the Yarlung River, which showed that, at that time, relative advanced agriculture and animal husbandry had developed there. Later, Zhigum Tsampo succeeded Nyatri Tsampo, but Armodaze, the chief of a sub-tribe, later killed him during tribal struggles. The two sons of Zhigum Tsampo were expelled to Gongbo. One son, Nyaqi, later became the king of Gongbo. The other, Shaqi, raised an army and took revenge on Armodaze, capturing the throne and changing his title to Pude Gungyal. He also built a mausoleum for his father and constructed the castle of Qoingye, which was called Qoinwadaze. According to the record of the Annals of Tibetan Kings by Soinam Gyaincain of the Sagya Sect, during the reign of Pude Gungyal, people had the ability to make charcoal, smelt bronze, steel, silver, and other metals; they could also construct channels to irrigate the fields. In addition, the plough and yoke appeared, and two-ox yokes were widely

used at that time. With the use of iron-made tools and animal power in farming, agricultural productive forces greatly increased and the population grew rapidly, leading to the flourishing of the tribes. With the development of the tribal unions, the power of their leaders became stronger. During the time of Nyatri Tsampo, there was a political system called the "Three Shangs and One Lun", which was filled with the distinctive features of tribal unions. The word "Shang" means the lineage of the mother's brother, namely leaders of the sub-tribes in blood lineage; while the word "Lun" refers to the Tsampo's family aides. The position of Dalun, namely today's Prime Minister began to appear in the time of the 16th Tsampo Daichubonammoxong; also established was the position of Anben, the financial officer in charge of collecting imperial taxes and tribute. Leaders and nobles of every tribe had to pledge loyalty to the Tsampo, and their official ranks, manors and subjects were naturally viewed as treasures conferred by the Tsampo. If one dared to be disloyal to the Tsampo, the punishment was likely to be deprivation of his rank and confiscation of property. In addition, when the leader of a tribe under the control of Tsampo had no male successor, everything reverted to the Tsampo. Hence, the distinct monarch-minister relationship between Tsampo and leaders of sub-tribes had been established.

By the time of the reign of the 29th Tsampo Tabonyexi, the Sheboye Tribe of Yarlung had fundamentally united the northern and southern banks of the Yarlung Zangbo River, and further outward expansion began. At that time, there had been two tribal unions along the Lhasa River: Yanbochasung (in the area of Pengbo) and Gyinorjam'en. Tubo Historical Documents of the Dunhuang Edition recounts their conflicts:

Senbo Gyidargyawo, the King of Yanbochasung, was a cruel and fatuous ruler who aroused the popular resentment of his ministers and officers. Nyangyisungnabo, King Senbo Gyidargya's family aide, made efforts to offer some advice for better royal administration, but unfortunately, the king not only rebuked him for his advice, but also evicted him from the ministerial ranks. Then, Nyangyisungnabo turned to Senbo

Gyichibamsung, the King of Gyinorjam'en. When war occurred, Senbo Gyidargyawo was killed and the Gyinorjam'en tribe annexed Yanbochasung. In recognition of the outstanding service Nyangyisungnabo has performed, King Senbo Gyichibamsung bestowed on him some of the lands that had formerly belonged to King Senbo Gyidargyawo. However, Nyamcenku, who was part of the administration run by Nyangyisungnabo, appealed to the King against the land grant decision, only to be denounced for his action. On the other side, the financial officer Weixuedorikugu was locked in an incessant struggle with the Prime Minister Shenchiretunkon, eventually killing him. The dead man's younger brother, Weiyeice appealed to King Senbo Gyichibamsung that Weixuedorikugu should also lose his life, but this, too, was rejected. As a result, Nyamcenku and Weiyeice, with their relatives Nong and Caibam joining them later, secretly schemed to pledge alliance to the Sheboye tribe to overthrow King Senbo Gyichibamsung. They sent a trusted aide to Qoingyel to contact Tabonyeshe, who agreed with their plan, even though the king was his brother-in-law. On the eve of the proposed attack, Tabonyeshe passed away and he was succeeded by his son, Luntsan, who continued the war plan. He sent over 10,000 soldiers to cross the Yarlung Zangbo River and took control of the areas along the Lhasa River. Finally, with the cooperation of Nyam, Wei, Nong and Caibam, Luntsan defeated the tribal unions of Gyinorjam'en. From then on, he was respectfully called King Namri Luntsan, and he responded by rewarding his followers for their deeds. Nyam, Wei, Nong were given 1,500 households as their subjects along with the relative lands, and Caibam was granted 300 households as his subjects. Thereafter, struggles broke out in another small tribal union called Nyamrochekar in the Xigaze area. Minister Qoibosuze killed his king and presented King Namri Luntsan with 20,000 households and the lands of the Xigaze area, and the king rewarded him according to his outstanding service. From then on, the tribal union of Sheboye united the middle and lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River, the main agricultural area of Tibet.



Tangka painting in the Potala Palace: metallurgical skills in early times.



Samye Monastery.

The History of the Tubo Kingdom

When Namri Luntsan unified the middle and lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River, except for the capital city of Qiwa Daze, he built another ruling center along the Lhasa River to administer the newly conquered areas. Tibetan historical sources say Songtsan Gambo, the son of Namri Luntsan, was born at Yarlunzhadui Palace in the Mochu Gongkar on the upper reaches of the Lhasa River (Barsam Wangtui: *Question on the Chronicle of Songtsan Gambo*, Tibetan Research, Vol.1, 1995). If we accept the view that Songtsan Gambo ascended to the throne at the age of 13, there has to be at least a doubling of the years of Namri Luntsan's rule after he unified the other small kingdoms. During this time, King Namri Luntsan made great efforts to consolidate the newly built power base. He took steps to crack down on remnant forces of local areas, and continued to launch wars against Suibi, Zhangzhung and other small kingdoms for further unification. He also made efforts to strengthen the position of the Tubo royal family by trying to coordinate the relationship between the new and old nobles who were engaged in incessant struggles over the distribution of royal powers. According to *Tubo Historical Documents of the Dunhuang Edition*, King Namri Luntsan dispatched soldiers to suppress a rebellion in the Tabo area, but he was poisoned to death by rebels. So, it was obvious that fierce struggles lasted for a long time in order to consolidate the newly established power.

There are disputes over when Songtsan Gambo was born, but scholars generally be-

lieve that his birth took place in 617, and he ascended to the throne in 629. Tubo Historical Documents, the Dunhuang Edition, say that when Songtsan Gambo came to power, subjects on his father's side were dissatisfied and resentful, while some on his mother's side openly deserted him. As the internal political situation was in a mess, Zhangzhung, Subi, Tabo, Gongbo and other small kingdoms near the Tubo Kingdom rose in rebellion against Songtsan Gambo's reign. Although he was only thirteen years old when he ascended the throne and began to handle state affairs, Songtsan Gambo showed his daring and determination by putting down the various rebellions. Historical sources recount, "he ordered killed those who had incited rebellion along with their descendents, while try to win back those common people who once opposed him". From then on, Songtsan Gambo, generally accepted as the founder of the Tubo Kingdom with a crucial role in the development of Tibet, adopted a series of great moves with far-reaching influence in order to consolidate the newly established kingdom.

Three great achievements can be named. Firstly, he created the Tibetan script and established a unified legal system, both of which have lasted until today. Based on the relative degree to which ancient Tibetans had developed, it seems possible that earlier efforts to create a written language could also have been made during the period of small kingdoms competing with each other, and it was highly likely that some of the Tibetan tribes had developed and used several immature written versions of their own dialects. Soon after his reign began, Sontsan Gambo sent the scholar Thonmi Sambhota and other younger nobles to India to study foreign scripts and languages. In the end, Thonmi Sambhota returned with the newly created Tibetan script, with an alphabet to represent the sounds of the spoken language. The new script also played an indispensable role in the administration of the Tubo kingdom. Sontsan Gambo promoted the new script with great enthusiasm and it bought the ancient civilization of Tubo into a brand-new era. Sontsan



Portrait of Songtsan Gambo.



Portrait of the Princess Wencheng.