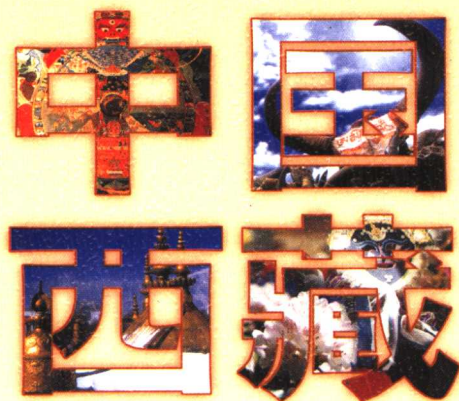


CHINA'S TIBET

Zhong Zangwen



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Geography

Today, the People's Republic of China is divided into 23 provinces, five autonomous regions, four municipalities directly under the Central Government, and two special administrative regions. Tibet is one of the five autonomous regions, featuring autonomy mainly by the Tibetan race.

Location and Area

The Tibet Autonomous Region in southwest China forms the southwestern portion of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. It adjoins the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and the provinces of Qinghai to the north, Sichuan to the east and Yunnan to the southeast, and the nations of Myanmar, India, Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal to the south and west along an international border of nearly 4,000 kilometers. The 1.22-million-square-kilometer autonomous region accounts for 12.8 percent of China's total land area.

Topography and Mountain Ranges

Averaging more than 4,000 meters in elevation, Tibet forms the main part of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and is known as the "roof of the world". While the topography is complex, the area can be divided into three distinct natural zones:

- The North Tibet Plateau in the north, which, accounting for two-thirds of the region in area, is surrounded by the Kunlun, Tanggula, Kangdese, and Nyainqentanglha mountains;
- The Tibet Valley in the south, where the Yarlung Zangbo River

and its tributaries flow;

- **High Mountains and Deep Valleys** in the east, including part of the Hengduan Mountains, which run east-west and then north-south.

Geomorphologically, there are six principal forms: polar altitude mountains, alpine mountains, medium-height mountains, low mountains, hills and plains. Volcanic, aeolian, karst and periglacial landforms are found as well.

The Himalayas are a group of mountain ranges running roughly parallel to one another in an east-west direction on the southern edge of the Tibet Plateau along China's border with India and Nepal. The mountains run for 2,400 kilometers at a width of 200 to 300 kilometers and altitudes averaging over 6,000 meters. Mount Qomolangma, the world's highest peak with an elevation of 8,848.13 meters, rising abruptly on the Sino-Nepalese border midway through the range. Four peaks each with an elevation of over 8,000 meters and 38 peaks each over 7,000 meters can be found in the more than 5,000 square kilometers surrounding Qomolangma.

Rivers and Lakes

More than 20 rivers with drainage areas in excess of 10,000 square kilometers and more than 100 with drainage areas of more than 2,000 square kilometers are found in Tibet. Best known are the Jinshajiang, Nujiang, Lancangjiang and Yarlung Zangbo rivers. Tibet has more rivers flowing into foreign countries than any other Chinese provinces, municipalities directly under the Central Government and autonomous regions. Great rivers of Asia that find their origin in Tibet include the Ganges, Hindus, Brahmaputra, Mekong, Salween and Irrawaddy. These rivers for the most part arise from rains, melted ice and snow and underground water, hence

their water is of excellent quality, their flow rate high and siltage low.

The Yarlung Zangbo River, the largest of its kind in Tibet, has its source in the Gyimayangzong Glacier at the northern foot of the Himalayas in Zhongba County. After flowing through Lhoyu and entering India it is known as the Brahmaputra. The 2,057-kilometer Chinese portion, with a drainage area of more than 240,000 square kilometers at an approximate average altitude of 4,500 meters high, is the world's highest-altitude river.

The 370-kilometer Yarlung Zangbo Grand Canyon, with a depth of 5,382 meters, the world's deepest, is only 74 meters wide at the narrowest point along its base and 200 meters at the widest.

The vast Tibet Plateau is bejeweled with more than 1,500 large and small lakes; the Nam Co, Siling Co and Zhaxi Namco are larger than 1,000 square kilometers and 47 other lakes are larger than 100 square kilometers. All told there are 24,183 square kilometers of lakes, about one-third of China's total. The Tibet Plateau is the area in China with the most dense concentration of lakes; in terms of number, area and altitude of lakes it leads all the world's plateaus. Most of these lakes are saline. Seventeen, all larger than 50 square kilometers, are located about 5,000 meters.

Climate

The Tibet Plateau's various complex topographies and landforms engender a distinctive climate. Beyond the general tendency of a cold, dry northwest and a warm, wet southeast, can be found a wide variety of localized climates and distinct vertical climatic belts. Two sayings—"different weather five kilometers apart" and "four seasons in one day"—well describe this phenomenon.

Tibet has thinner air, more sunlight, lower temperatures and

less precipitation than other areas in China. The air contains only 150 to 170 grams of oxygen per cubic meter, 62 to 65.4 percent the rate found in plains areas. Solar energy is more readily available than elsewhere nationally, with more than one-third to even double that available in plains area at the same latitude. There are also more hours of daylight than elsewhere in China; in Lhasa there are 3,021 hours of daylight annually. Daytime and nighttime temperature vary greatly, despite low average temperatures and low annual temperature differentials. Average temperatures and peak temperatures for the hottest month in Lhasa and Xigaze are 10-15 degrees centigrade lower than in Chongqing, Wuhan and Shanghai at about the same latitude. Annual temperatures in Lhasa, Qamdo, Xigaze and elsewhere in Tibet range 18 to 20 degrees centigrade over the year. At elevations in excess of 5,000 meters in Ngari Prefecture, daytime temperatures in August climb above 10 degrees centigrade, only to fall below zero at night.

Seasonal precipitation is disproportionately distributed throughout the region. The dry season and the rainy season are clearly demarcated. Rain usually falls at night. Annual precipitation is 5,000 millimeters in the lower elevations to the southeast decreasing gradually to a mere 50 millimeters in the northwest. Precipitation from October to April accounts for only 10 to 20 percent of the yearly total. Rainfall is concentrated in the period between May and September, accounting for about 90 percent of the yearly precipitation.

Administrative Division

The Tibet Autonomous Region is composed of one city and six prefectures, including one city directly under the regional government, 71 counties, and one county-level city. Lhasa, the

capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region, is the political, economic, cultural, and communication and transportation center for the entire region. It has a recorded history of more than 1,300 years. Located on the northern bank in the middle reaches of the Lhasa River, a tributary of the Yarlung Zangbo River, the city has an elevation of 3,658 meters. The city, with an area of 30,000 square kilometers, is home to 400,000 people, including 140,000 living in the 51-square-kilometer city proper. Tibetans, Han, Hui and other ethnic groups live in the city, with Tibetans accounting for 87 percent of the population.

Agriculture and animal husbandry are relatively well developed in the areas surrounding the city proper. A group of vegetable and meat production bases have recently been set up. The region's mainstay industrial enterprises are concentrated in the Lhasa area. There is a network of more than 10,000 commercial outlets in the city.

Great changes have taken place to the city of Lhasa since Tibet's peaceful liberation in 1951, and even more since China's implementation of the reform and opening policy in 1979. The urban area has seen the construction of many new buildings combining traditional Tibetan and modern styles, such as the Lhasa Hotel, the Tibet People's Hall, the Tibet University, the Tibet Gymnasium, the Regional People's Hospital, the Lhasa Cinema, the Potala Palace Square, the Tibet Library, the Tibet Museum and the Lhasa Children's Center. Infrastructure including transportation, telecommunications and energy has developed rapidly. Program-controlled telephones and a satellite communication ground station have already been set up. A regionwide highway network centering around Lhasa has been formed. In the urban area the roads are asphalt and there is running water and a sewage system. The 20-to-30-square-

kilometer Yangbajain geothermal field, listed as a key State development pilot project, delivers ground surface natural thermal energy as high as 107,000 kilocalories per second. With an estimated 150,000 kilowatts potential, it is the largest geothermal power plant currently under development in China.

Lhasa has more than 200 sites known for their cultural relics. More than 20 of these have already been opened to tourism soon to be joined by another 30. Main tourist destinations include famous structuresólike the Jokhang Monastery, the Ramoche Monastery, the Potala Palace, the Gandain Monastery, the Zhaibung Monastery, the Sera Monastery, and the Norbu Lingka and picturesque scenic spots such as the Nam Co Lake, hot springs at Derzhom, and the nature reserves in Lhunzhub and Maizhokunggar. The Barkor Street at the center of the old city is a place where tourists can find some of what remains of the city's original appearance. Lined with closely packed shops, it is bustling with activity. An endless stream of pilgrims winds its way around the monastery, passing by handicrafts and other traditional goods spread out for sale to either side.

Natural Resources

Tibet's complex topography and widely varying climates result in an abundance of natural resources. Its 1.2-million-square-kilometer area is crisscrossed by rivers offering enormous potential water power. Snow mountains and valleys and the North Tibet Plateau house a wide variety of minerals. The eastern and southern parts of the region are largely covered with primeval forests, home to rare animals and plants.

Plants

Tibet is like a giant plant kingdom, with more than 5,000 species of higher plants. Gyirong, Yadong and Chentang in western Tibet and Medog, Zayu and Lhoyu in southeast Tibet are like museums of rare plantlife. Even in northern Tibet with its extreme natural conditions, there exist more than 100 kinds of plants.

Tibet is also one of China's largest forest areas, preserving intact primeval forests. Almost all the principal plant species from the tropical to the frigid zones of the northern hemisphere are found here. Forestry reserves exceed 2.08 billion cubic meters. The coverage rate is 9.84 percent. Common species include Himalayan pine, alpine larch, *Pinus yunnanensis*, *Pinus armandis*, Himalayan spruce, Himalayan fir, hard-stemmed longbract fir, hemlock, Monterey *Larix potaniniis*, Tibetan larch, Tibetan cypress and Chinese juniper. Spruce, fir and hemlock are distributed most widely, accounting for 48 percent of Tibet's forests by area and 61 percent by stock. They are found mainly in the humid subalpine zones of the Himalayas, Nyainqentanglha and Hengduan ranges.

There are about 926,000 hectares of pine forest in Tibet. Two species, the Tibetan longleaf pine and Tibetan lacebark pine, are included in the State listing of protected tree species. There are more than 1,000 kinds of plants used for medicine growing wild, 400 of which are in common use. Particularly well-known medicinal plants include Chinese caterpillar fungus, *Fritillaria Thunbergii*, *Rhizoma Picrorhizae*, rhubarb, *Rhizoma Gastrodiae*, pseudo-ginseng, *Codonopsis Pilosula*, *Radix Gentiane Macrophyllae*, *Radix Salviae Miltiorrhizae*, glossy ganoderma, and *Caulis Spatholobi*. In addition, there are over 200 known species of fungi, including the famous edible fungi songrong, hedgehog hydnum, zhangzi fungus, mushrooms, black fungi, tremellas and yellow fungi and fungi with medical use such as tuckahoes, songganlan, stone-like omphalias.

Animals

There are 142 species of mammals in Tibet, 473 species of birds, 49 species of reptiles, 44 species of amphibians, 64 species of fish and more than 2,300 species of insects. Wild animals include *Cercopi-thecus*, Assamese macaque, rhesus monkey, muntjak, head-haired deer, wild cattle, red-spotted antelopes, leopards, clouded leopards, black bears, wild cats, weasels, little pandas, red deer, river deer, white-lipped deer, wild yaks, Tibetan antelopes, wild donkeys, argalis, Mongolian gazelles, foxes, wolves, lynxes, brown bears, jackals, blue sheep, and snow leopards. The Tibetan antelope, wild yak, wild donkey and argali are all rare species particular to the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, and are under State protection. The white-lipped deer, found only in China, is of particular rarity. The black-necked crane and the Tibetan pheasant are under the State first-class protection.

Minerals

There are more than 90 known mineral types in Tibet. Total reserves of 26 of these have been verified, with that of 11 ranking among the top five in China by province. The region's 2,500 square kilometers of chromite deposits, concentrated along the Lake Banggong Co to the Nujiang River rift zone in northern Tibet and along the Yarlung Zangbo River rift zone, are the most in China. The Norbusa Chromite Mine in Shannan Prefecture has become a chromite production base. Tibet's prospective lithium deposits are among the most in the world and the region serves as China's lithium production base. Prospective copper and gypsum reserves rank second in China, boron, magnesite, barite and arsenic third, mica and peat fourth, and kaolin fifth. Other significant mineral deposits include salt, natural soda, mirabilite, sulphur, phosphorus, potassium, diatomaceous earth, iceland spar, corundum, rock quartz and agate.

Energy

Tibet is weak in energy resources such as coal, oil and natural gas but rich in hydro, geothermal, solar and wind energy. Tibet produces approximately 200 million kilowatts of natural hydroenergy annually, about 30 percent of the nation's total. It has 354.8 billion cubic meters in surface water resources, 13.5 percent of the nation's total, and 330 billion cubic meters in glacial water resources. Approximately 70 percent of the region's surface waters is found in the hydroenergy capacity in the southeast. The main stream of the Yarlung Zangbo River has a natural hydroenergy capacity of 80 million kilowatts, which rises to 90 million kilowatts with the inclusion of its five tributaries—the Doxung Zangbo, Nyang Qu, Lhasa, Niya and Parlung Zangbo

rivers.

Tibet has about 56.59 million kilowatts in exploitable hydroenergy resources, 15 percent of the nation's total. Of particular importance is the Yarlung Zangbo River, with more than 47.37 million kilowatts in exploitable energy capacity. Investigations have found more than 10 sites and sections of the river suitable for the construction of hydropower stations. In area between Paidi in Mainling County and Lidong Bridge in Medog County, Nyingchi Prefecture, the river makes a U-turn dropping 2,190 meters over the course of a famous 200-kilometer gorge. A 36-kilometer channel cut through the rock would allow the river to flow directly from Paidi to Lidong Bridge where a giant 40-million-kilowatt hydropower plant could be built.

Investigations have found that Tibet leads China in geothermal energy. More than 600 geothermal sites have been located in the Nujiang-Jinshajiang-Lancangjiang tectonic zone, the Yarlung Zangbo rift zone and the Nagqu-Nyemo rift zone, including hot springs, boiling springs, geysers, hot flow rivers and exothermic ground surfaces, with an estimated heat discharge of 550,000 kilocalories per second, the equivalent in heat produced annually to about 2.4 million tons of standard coal. The Yangbajain geothermal field in Damxung County, Lhasa, is currently China's largest high-temperature steam geothermal field, and, moreover, one of the largest geothermal fields in operation in the world today.

History

China is a unified multinational country. Tibet has since the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) been an inseparable part of China. Prior to the common era, the ancestors of the Tibetan people had contacts with the Han people living in the Central Plains of China. During the long years leading up to the seventh century the many tribes scattered on the Tibet Plateau gradually came together to form the Tibetan ethnic group.

Tubo Kingdom

Early in the seventh century China moved into a new stage of its history. The Tang Dynasty (618-907) was a powerful and politically united regime that initially established order over the shifting and chaotic situation that had prevailed for more than 300 years in China. At the same time, the great Tibetan leader Songtsan Gambo brought together more than 10 separate tribes, an event commonly seen as marking the establishment of the Tubo Kingdom, making his capital in present-day Lhasa. Songtsan Gambo had good relations with the Tang court and benefitted from the importation of Tang technologies (advanced for the day), and was influenced by Tang culture and politics. He twice sent ministers to the Tang Dynasty court requesting a member of the imperial family be given him in marriage and in 641 he married Princess Wencheng, a member of Emperor Taizong's family. Introduced into Tibet during this time were Chinese technologies for wine-making, grinding, and paper and ink making. Sons of the Tibetan aristocracy were and ink making. Sons of the Tibetan ar-

istocracy were sent to the Tang capital Chang'an (present-day Xi'an) to study. Literati from the Tang court went to the Tibetan capital to handle communications with the emperor. During the reign of Songtsan Gambo political, economic and cultural relations between Tang and Tubo were friendly. Laudatory titles given King Songtsan Gambo by Emperor Gaozong include Commandant-escort, Commandery Prince of the Western Sea and Companion Prince.

This pattern of friendly relations established during the reign of Songtsan Gambo was carried on during the next two hundred years. In 710 the Tang Princess Jincheng was sent to Tibet to marry the Tubo King Tride Tsugtsen, accompanied by several tens of thousands of pieces of embroidered satin brocade, a variety of technical writings and various other useful items. Princess Jincheng later gave money to support Buddhist monks from Yutian (now in modern Xinjiang) and elsewhere on their trips to Tibet to build monasteries and translate sutras. She also requested that Chinese classical works such as *The Book of Songs With Annotation* by Mao Heng, *The Book of Rites*, *Zuo Qiuming's Chronicles*, and *Xiao Tong's Literary Selections* be sent to her from the Tang court.

In 821 King Chiri Pachen of Tibet three times sent envoys to Chang'an to discuss forming an alliance with the Tang Empire. Emperor Muzong ordered his prime minister to effect the alliance in a grand ceremony held in the western suburbs of the capital. The following year high-ranking representatives of the Tang court including Liu Yuanding were dispatched to Tibet to participate in a similar ceremony marking the alliance held in the eastern suburbs of Lhasa. Representatives of the Tibetan king included his chief ministers.

This all occurred during the first and second years (822 and

823) of the Changqing reign of the Tang Dynasty, and accordingly has been called the “Changqing Alliance” by historians. The two parties agreed to “amity as though they were of one family” and to “treat their sacrificial alters as though they were one.” An account of the alliance is recorded on three tablets, and the “Tang-Tubo Alliance Tablet”, one of the three, still stands before the Jokhang Monastery in Lhasa.

Beginning around 842 the Tubo Kingdom broke up. Rival groups of ministers and members of the royal family engaged in internecine struggle. Power was reduced to the local level. This state of affairs continued for more than 400 years.

Tibet Became a Part of China in the Mid-13th Century

Early in the 13th century, the leader of the Mongolian people Genghis Khan established a Mongol Khanate north of China. In 1247 the Mongol Prince Godan invited Pandit Gonggar Gyaincain, an eminent monk with the Sagya Sect, to a meeting in Liangzhou (modern Wuwei in Gansu Province). He offered the submission of Tibet to the Mongol Khanate and the acceptance of a defined local administrative system and in return the Sagya were given political power in Tibet. In 1271 the Mongolian conquerors took Yuan as the name of their dynasty. In 1279 following their defeat of the Song they completed their unification of all of China. The newly united Central Government continued control over Tibet, including it as an administrative unit directly governed by the Chinese Yuan Dynasty Central Government.

In 1260, when Kublai Khan (1215-1294) ascended the throne, he conferred the title State Tutor on Gonggar Gyaincain's nephew Pagba, Prince of the Dharma of the Sagya order. In 1264 Kublai Khan established the Zongzhi (General) Council in charge of Bud-