



**TIBET**

**Leaps Forward**

# TIBET Leaps Forward

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## Editor's Note

CHINA'S TIBET REGION, known as the "Roof of the World," has gone through earth-shaking changes in a brief historical period. From an extremely reactionary, dark, cruel and barbarous society under feudal serfdom, it has leapt into a socialist society full of life and vigour and has made rapid progress in every sphere of activity.

In 1959, when one million serfs won emancipation during the Democratic Reform in Tibet, a few reactionaries abroad clamoured that a "human tragedy" had occurred in Tibet. In 1965, when the Tibet Autonomous Region was founded and the emancipated serfs began to exercise their rights as masters of their own destiny, the reactionaries again lamented, saying that this was the "death of the Tibetan nationality." But facts speak louder than words and the strongest refutation of these slanders is the fact of Tibet's own leap forward.

During their visit to Tibet in 1975, the writers of this book recorded what they had seen there, and some of their eye-witness accounts later appeared in the weekly *Peking Review*. Further revisions and additions have been made by the authors for the present volume.

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## Peking to Lhasa

WE FLEW TO LHASA, capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region, aboard a CAAC\* airliner on its regular flight from Peking.

Under the guidance of Chairman Mao's proletarian revolutionary line, Tibet was peacefully liberated in 1951,\*\* the armed rebellion in 1959\*\*\* by the Dalai traitorous clique was swiftly quelled, and the Democratic Reform† that

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\*General Administration of Civil Aviation of China.

\*\*After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the representatives of the Central People's Government and the Tibetan local government held talks, and, on May 23, 1951, signed the Agreement of the Central People's Government and the Local Government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet.

\*\*\*Against the wishes of the people of Tibet, the reactionary clique of the upper strata in the region, with the Dalai as their chieftain, openly tore up the agreement on the peaceful liberation of Tibet and, aided and abetted by the Indian expansionists, mustered a gang of traitors to stage an armed rebellion against the motherland in March 1959. The People's Liberation Army, supported by the clergy and people of various circles, swiftly quelled this counter-revolutionary rebellion.

†The Democratic Reform, carried out in Tibet from 1959 to 1961, overthrew the reactionary feudal serf system. Under this system, the chief means of production—all land and most livestock—were owned by a tiny minority of serf-owners. None of the peasants had any land and most herdsmen had no livestock. They worked for the serf-owners and, owned by individual serf-owners, they had no political rights or personal freedom. The Democratic Reform gave the peasants and herdsmen land, livestock and houses, and political rights, and made them masters of the new Tibet.

destroyed the feudal serf system followed closely in its wake. In 1965, the Tibet Autonomous Region was formed, and the following year saw the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution sweep the area as it did the rest of the country. Tibet has advanced from feudal serfdom direct to a flourishing socialist society in less than two decades since the Democratic Reform. The change these momentous events have wrought upon the region is indeed tremendous.

## Over the "Roof of the World"

We flew west after a stop-over in Chengtu, capital of Szechuan Province, and held a westerly course for about an hour. The brownish Chinsha River winding through deep gorges came within sight. Soon we crossed over into Tibet. The plane climbed to 8,500 metres. When we peered down again the scenery had completely changed. Through swirling clouds we saw snow- and ice-capped peaks and caught glimpses of forested ravines and sparkling lakes. The mountain ranges here are some 6,000 to 7,000 metres above sea level. Tibet is not called the "Roof of the World" for nothing.

Surrounded by the Himalayas, the Tangla and Kunlun mountains, Tibet covers 1.2 million square kilometres, constituting one-eighth of China's land mass. The average elevation is over 4,000 metres.

Topographically, Tibet can be roughly divided into four parts. The northern part, a vast open tableland with an average elevation of over 4,500 metres, covers about two-thirds of the region's area. Here is a gently undulating landscape of valleys which make excellent pastureland for livestock.

The Southern Tibet Valleys in the Yalutsangpo River basin have an average elevation of less than 4,000 metres. The numerous fertile plains here provide most of Tibet's farmland.

The Himalayas rise over 6,000 metres above sea level on the southern side of the Southern Tibet Valleys. Crowning the crests is the 8,848-metre-high Qomolangma Feng (Mt. Jolmo Lungma), the highest in the world. Following the successful scaling of the summit from the northern slope in 1960, a team of Chinese mountaineers, including a woman, conquered the peak a second time from the same side on May 27, 1975.

Running from north to south in eastern Tibet are towering mountain ridges and torrential rivers raging through gorges, which in some places reach a depth of 2,500 metres from the peaks. Perennially snow-capped peaks overlooking dense forests on the mountainsides and all-year farms at the foot of the mountains typify the landscape in this part of the region.

## **"A Rainbow Bridge to Peking"**

For centuries, Tibet's massive mountain ranges made communication extremely difficult. It was linked to the rest of China by tortuous paths over which pack mules, horses and yaks slowly threaded their way across innumerable mountains and rivers. Tibet was sealed off by ice and snow during the greater part of the year. A round trip from Lhasa to Chengtu in those days often took up to a year. After liberation, a motor road, the Szechuan-Tibet Highway, was built in 1954 to connect the two cities. Another one, the Chinghai-Tibet Highway, was opened up in the same year to

join Sining in Chinghai with Lhasa. A round trip by bus on either route now takes about 20 days. Another highway was built in 1957, making Yehcheng in Sinkiang a five- or six-day car drive from Garyarsa in Tibet. In 1974, a new highway linking Tibet with Yunnan Province was opened to traffic.

Before liberation it was thought that the weather on the Tibetan Plateau was completely unpredictable and the region was declared "off limits" for airlines. In 1965, however, regular flights between Peking and Lhasa by way of Chengtu were inaugurated, thanks to the intrepid efforts of the new China's airmen. Another airline linking Lhasa with Lanchow in Kansu Province went into operation in 1975.

All this not only greatly facilitates the communication of Tibet with other parts of the country, but brings it ever closer to Peking — the heart of the motherland.

For quite some years after liberation, the Tibetans continued to undertake long and difficult journeys to reach the interior provinces. How they wished that one day a "golden bridge" could span the snow-capped mountains and swirling rivers like a rainbow, linking Tibet directly with Peking. Today their beautiful dream has been fulfilled.

With us on our flight were a few Tibetan passengers, with whom we naturally fell into conversation. We learned that several were workers going home for their holidays. They were attending three-year university courses in Chungking or Peking. One mentioned that they were all getting their regular pay while studying and that the air passage was borne by the state. Two young Tibetan girls on the plane were returning home to Lhasa after graduating from the Szechuan Conservatory. They were called Jangchan and Drolkar, and both were members of the Tibetan Opera Troupe. These young people seemed to be enjoying the air trip thoroughly,



their lively conversation often interrupted by bursts of happy laughter.

Suddenly the plane hit an air-pocket and dropped some distance. Soon we were flying along a valley which seemed barely wide enough for our plane. Right below was the broiling Yalutsangpo River. Then we were taxiing to a stop, 3,000 air kilometres from Peking in little more than three hours.

## “Sunny City”

EMERGING FROM THE PLANE, we found our eyes immediately dazzled by the brilliant sunlight. The air was exceedingly clean. The fields and rivers stretched towards the horizon where mountain ranges stood in sharp relief. Flaming red banners fluttered atop the airport building against an azure sky.

Meteorological records show that Lhasa has 3,900 hours of sunshine every year. Even in the wet season it rains mostly during the night. In winter, when it snows, the sun comes out at frequent intervals. So, Lhasa is known as the “Sunny City.”

From the airport we went north by car along a river bank, sometimes climbing steep slopes and sometimes running level with the river. Then we followed a tributary of the Yalu-tsangpo, the Lhasa River, passing through fields of swaying *chingke* (highland barley) and wheat in the mountain-girt valleys. There were thick stands of trees, and the perfume of flowering peas and rape was heavy around us. Soon the outline of a massive building, the famous Potala Palace, loomed in the distance. We were approaching Lhasa.

## A Stroll Through the New City of Lhasa

We went for a walk along broad, tree-lined asphalt streets. The side-walks shaded by lush foliage were like green cor-

ridors warding off the harsh highland sunlight. We saw women with braided hair, dressed in Tibetan costumes and with young children on their backs, old men wearing soft felt hats and woollen gowns, and many young people. They all looked happy.

According to Drongzurphuntsog, a Tibetan cadre who had kindly offered to show us around, we were in the new sector of Lhasa. He said he had first visited the city in 1959, before the counter-revolutionary armed rebellion and its suppression. What he saw then was nothing like the Lhasa we were seeing today. The city was already over 1,000 years old. The built-up area was centred around Parkor Street with the Potala on the western outskirts. Between the palace and the city was a stretch of swampy land, with a few villas owned by the nobility. On his second visit in 1965, he said, the swamp had been drained and had become a bustling sector of the new city. "The Potala Palace has moved into the city. It's no longer way out on the western outskirts," he chuckled.

After the peaceful liberation of Tibet in 1951 some new buildings were put up in Lhasa, but urban construction did not begin in a big way until just before Tibet became an autonomous region\* in September 1965. The city's new sector, more than twice the size of the old, went up in less than a year's time and new buildings have been added constantly since, so that their total floor space is now 10 times that of the old ones.

We followed the stream of people into a big department store which has a floor space of some 3,000 square metres.

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\* In areas inhabited by minority nationalities, autonomous regions, prefectures and counties have been established with organs of self-government exercising autonomy within the limits of their authority as prescribed by the Constitution and law.

The shelves were stocked with several thousand kinds of goods from Shanghai, Peking and elsewhere in the country, as well as local products. The latter included woollen fabrics, woollen yarn and blankets, matches, sugar, soap and Tibetan costumes.

At the local products counter an old Tibetan was laughing and joking with the shop assistants as they helped him select a piece of woollen fabric for a new garment. Happy with his purchase, he moved on to other counters.

We were told that the volume of business in this store had got larger every year. Sales in 1974 were twice those of 1965, the year before the Cultural Revolution. We later discovered that there were three other such department stores in Lhasa, as well as stores buying local produce such as wool, sheepskins and medicinal herbs, to mention only a few. We also saw a store dealing mainly in tools, farm implements and machinery. Since 1959, with price levels remaining stable, the government has lowered commodity prices several times while raising the purchasing price paid to the peasants and herdsmen for local produce. Tea, the traditional drink of Tibet, cost 5.24 yuan a kilogramme in 1959. Now it is 3.02 yuan. The state purchasing price for a kilogramme of wool was 0.80 yuan in 1959. Now it is 2.4 yuan. This means that a kilogramme of brick tea today costs a herdsman only 1.3 kilogrammes of wool instead of 6.5 kilos as it did in 1959.

Northeast of the Potala Palace is the People's Hospital. In 1951, when the People's Liberation Army entered Lhasa, some Han doctors accompanying the army set up a clinic in an old building to treat Tibetan patients. In 1956, the state replaced it with the present complex, consisting of a

three-storeyed main building and several annexes. Now the hospital has more than 500 staff members, 250 beds for in-patients, and departments of internal medicine, ear, nose and throat, surgery, obstetrics and paediatrics. It has the medical equipment one finds in any modern hospital. Besides this hospital there are three others, comparable in size, as well as one wholly staffed by local practitioners of Tibetan medicine.

The offices of the *Tibetan Daily*, the Tibetan People's Broadcasting Station and the Tibetan People's Publishing House are also in this area. The *Tibetan Daily*, which first appeared in 1956, has two editions, one in Tibetan, and the other in Han, or Chinese. The radio station, established in 1958, is bilingual, as is the publishing house. Nearby there is also a bookstore, a post office, a branch of the People's Bank, a cinema-cum-theatre, a photo-studio. . . .

We entered the bookstore. The shelves facing the entrance were filled with the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin and of Chairman Mao, available in both the Tibetan and Han languages. The Tibetan people study them in real earnest. Between 1972 and 1974, 800,000 copies of these books were printed for circulation. Also on sale were coloured pictures, pictorial magazines and books on the social and natural sciences. The magazines *Hongqi (Red Flag)*, *China Pictorial* and *Nationalities Pictorial* were available in both languages. The store was crowded with people making purchases or just browsing over the publications.

In the old days only the serf-owners and lamas of the higher orders had access to culture, while practically all the serfs and slaves were illiterate. Today a new generation of cultured people is growing up.

## A New Generation

Leaving the bookstore, we visited the Lhasa No. 1 Primary School. The children were lined up in the tree-clad yard doing exercises designed for growing young bodies. The five-year school has more than 1,000 pupils enrolled in 19 classes; over 90 per cent of the Tibetan pupils are sons and daughters of former serfs. Their textbooks are in Tibetan. Four of the 32 lessons each week are devoted to the study of the Han language. The school is run on the principle that education must serve proletarian politics and be integrated with productive labour. Pupils in the fourth and fifth years put in half a day a week working in nearby factories. They also go out to neighbouring people's communes to help with the harvests. The teachers and students cultivate several vegetable gardens in the school. They also raise pigs.

Before liberation, Lhasa had only one school. Enrolment was restricted to children of the nobility, while those of the great multitude of serfs were completely barred from school. These children had to perform heavy corvée duties as serfs at the age of seven or eight, frequently reviled and beaten by the serf-owners.

After the People's Liberation Army entered Tibet in 1951, the No. 1 Primary School was established — the first in Lhasa to offer free education to the children of the working people. Today the number of schools in and around the city has mushroomed to over 40, including primary, secondary and intermediate vocational schools, with a total enrolment of 10,000. More than 80 per cent of Lhasa's school-age children now go to school. A training school for primary school teachers was set up in 1965, and since then nearly 1,000 students have graduated from it. The Tibet Institute for

Nationalities, the region's first school of higher learning, trains Tibetan cadres. The Teachers' College of Tibet, founded in 1975, trains teachers for middle schools in order to keep pace with educational developments in the region.

Like Lhasa, the rest of Tibet has made good progress in the field of education. Now the region has 4,900 primary schools, 50-odd middle and intermediate vocational schools, 2 colleges and 10 workers' spare-time colleges. Three out of every four school-age children go to school. The number of primary school students is 2.8 times that of 1965, and that of secondary school students, 6.5 times. Since 1971 over 2,300 experienced workers, peasants and herdsmen have been sent to the interior provinces to study in institutes of higher learning or other schools.

## History Bears Witness

Lhasa is one of China's ancient cities, with magnificent buildings, priceless historical relics, and many fine examples of Tibetan art dating from centuries back. These are all well preserved thanks to meticulous maintenance and frequent renovation work funded since liberation by the People's Government.

We visited the Potala Palace and the Jokhan Monastery.

The Potala Palace stands high on a hill and, with its dazzling sea of golden roofs, is a magnificent sight. The 13-storeyed main building soars some 120 metres high. The original palace with 999 rooms was built in the 7th century by the *tsanpu* (Tibetan ruler) Srongsangampo. But it was destroyed in tribal wars, and only one little room built in a rocky cave was left when reconstruction was started in the 17th century during the rule of the Fifth Dalai.

The present Potala Palace has over 1,000 rooms, decorated with countless Buddhist images, reliefs displaying excellent workmanship, and fascinating wall paintings in brilliant colours. They show traces of the artistic styles found in the interior parts of China — a fact testifying to the cultural exchange between the Han and the Tibetan peoples.

The three-storeyed gold-roofed Jokhan Monastery, built 1,300 years ago, contains thousands of wooden, clay, stone, bronze, gold and silver sculptures, reliefs and large mural paintings.

There are wall paintings in both the Potala and the Jokhan depicting the journey which the Han princess, Wen Cheng, and her retinue made to reach Tibet building roads and bridges as they travelled. Her husband was the same *tsanpu* Srontsangampo, who, at the beginning of the 7th century, united the tribes on the Tibetan Plateau for the first time in history. At his own request he was allowed by the Tai Tsung Emperor of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) to marry Princess Wen Cheng. He was also given the titles of “*fumatuwei*” and the “Prince of the Western Sea.” Later, another princess, Chin Cheng, was given in marriage to the *tsanpu* Tridetsogtan by the Tang emperor Chung Tsung. The statues of Princess Wen Cheng and Srontsangampo in the Jokhan are especially interesting.

The Monument to the Unity Between Nephew and Uncle,\*\* erected in A.D. 823 in front of the Jokhan Monastery, is still in good condition. Its carved inscription, in both Han and Tibetan, reads in part: “Nephew and uncle have con-

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\* A traditional title conferred on the husband of a royal princess.

\*\* Because of the two marriages mentioned in the article, Tibetan *tsanpus* pledged themselves as nephews to the Tang emperors.



ferred and agreed that their government be as one and that there be great harmony."

Then we went to an exhibition room in Norbu Lingka, formerly the summer palace of the Dalai. The exhibition was sponsored by the region's Commission for the Preservation of Cultural Objects. Among the many historical treasures on display were the golden seal of the "Great Treasure Divine King" granted to Pagspa by an emperor of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), the golden seal of the "White Orchid King" granted to Sodnamzangpo in the same dynasty, the imperial decrees issued by the Yuan court to local Tibetan officials, and the paper currency of the Yuan Dynasty. We saw the imperial decrees and edicts issued by the emperors of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) to leaders of the Lamaist sects in Tibet, conferring on them the titles of "King," "Divine King" and "Tutor of the Empire." Also on exhibit were the jade and gold seals granted to these leaders and a gold plate engraved with the imperial decree conferring the title of the "Great Mercy Divine King" on Shkyyeshei, a disciple of Tzongkhapa who was the leader of the Gelug (Yellow) Sect then on the rise. There was a portrait of Shkyyeshei woven on a silk fabric given him by one of the Ming emperors. Objects from the Ching Dynasty (1644-1911) included the gold and jade seals granted to several incarnations of the Dalai and Panchen, and the "Imperial Programme for the Rehabilitation of Tibet" approved by the Chien Lung Emperor in 1793. This programme clearly stated that the central government's high commissioner in Tibet should take charge of the region's personnel and civil administration, and its financial, military and external affairs. All these documents and seals were written or carved either in Han and Tibetan, or in Han, Tibetan and Mongolian, or in Han, Tibetan and Manchurian.