

TIBET ON THE ROOF OF THE WORLD



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TIBET, CHINA'S SOUTHWESTERN FRONTIER

Tibet is unfamiliar to most outsiders. Yet its unique geography, wondrous scenery, interesting customs and splendid art are enchanting.

MAGNIFICENT SCENERY, RICH RESOURCES

Tibet is one of China's largest nationality autonomous regions. To its north and east is the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces; to the south and west is Burma, India, Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal and the Kashmir area. Tibet covers one-eighth of China's territory—1.2 million square kilometers—its people number 1.898 million, of which 94 percent are Tibetans. The others are Menba, Luoba, Han and Hui.

On the southern part of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau at an average altitude of 4,000 meters above sea level, Tibet is really "the roof of the world". Even a small hill here is higher than the main peak of the Alps. There are stunning ranges and snow-clad peaks. The Zangbei grassland, two-thirds of the region, is its main pastoral area. The world's highest mountain, Qomolangma at 8,848 meters in the mid-Himalayas, stands on the border between China and Nepal. Eastern Tibet is an alpine valley area, its main forest lands.

Glaciers in the great mountains on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau give birth to many great rivers. The Yarlung Zangbo River flows eastward across Tibet, then pours back across India where it is called the Brahmaputra. In

Tibet alone it is 2,057 kilometers long. The valleys of this river and its tributaries are called the Zangnan. They are the main agricultural area, and contain the principal cities and towns, and over half the population. Tibet has 1,500 lakes, one-third of China's lake area, and these are an important base for the development of fisheries and animal husbandry.

Tibet's large territory, complicated geology and topography, and varied climate give it a great abundance of natural resources. There are 5,700 species of higher plants and 600 of birds and animals. Some ingredients important in Chinese traditional medicine are found here, for example, musk, bear gallbladder, Chinese caterpillar fungus, the tuber of gastrodia (*Gastrodia elata*), the bulb of fritillary (*Fritillaria thunbergii*), and snow-lotus.

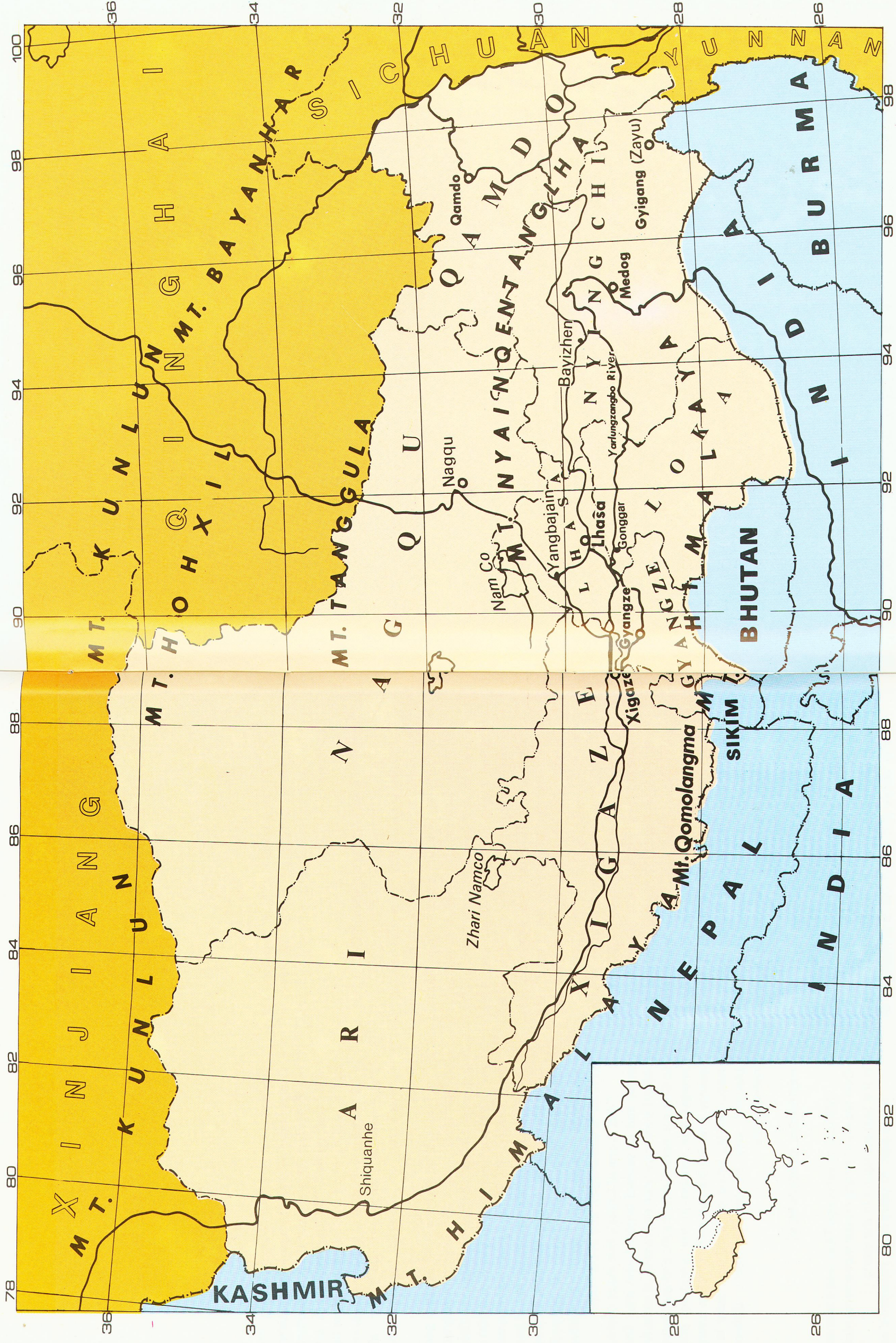
Tibet is one of China's five major pastoral areas and its second largest forest area. Over 40 minerals have been discovered. It ranks first in China in potential hydraulic and geothermal energy, and second in the world for solar energy (the Sahara ranks first). These energy resources are being explored and used in a planned way to benefit Tibet's different nationalities.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Millions of years ago Tibet was a vast sea. Over the eons, strong crustal movements made it the highest region in the world.

In the past 20 years many Paleolithic and

MAP OF THE TIBET AUTONOMOUS REGION





The Himalayas, with Mt. Qomolangma (top).

Neolithic sites have been discovered, indicating that humans were living here at least 4,000-20,000 years ago. In the long melding process of history, its native people merged with peoples from the north, including the Qiang, Mongolian and Han nationalities, to form today's Tibetans.

Historically the Tibetan people have made important contributions to the forming of the Chinese multi-national country. Brave and industrious, they have struggled tenaciously in an adverse natural environment to survive and develop, creating a splendid culture. In the beginning of the 7th century, King Songtsan Gambo, an outstanding person, unified Tibet and built a strong Tubo slavery state. The capital was established at Lhasa, a written language created and Buddhism established. From this time on, Tibet entered a new historical stage, expanding its contacts with the outside world year after year.

The Himalayas blocked the Tibetans' way west and south, so their connections with the outside world moved mainly northeast where the Hans lived. The exact date when Tibetan-Han contacts began is untraceable. But archaeological finds show that as early as 4,000 years ago Tibetans had interchanges with the Hans of the Yellow River Valley. In the early 4th century, Li Xiong set up a separatist regime in western Sichuan bordering Tibet and called himself king. The road between Chengdu (now Sichuan's capital) and Lhasa began to open, passing through Qamdo, a city in eastern Tibet. In 586, the Sump tribe who lived around Lhasa sent envoys with tribute to the Sui Dynasty, an indication that exchanges between the Tibetans and Hans had moved to a higher level.

From the early 7th century to the mid-9th century, when Tibet was a Tubo power and the inland was under the Tang Dynasty, an

*Statues of King Songtsan Gambo
and Princess Wencheng.*



upsurge of exchanges came between the two regimes. In 641, the Tang emperor Tai Zong married Princess Wencheng to the Tibetan king Songtsan Gambo, and conferred on him the office of "Imperial Son-in-Law Governor"

with the title "Prince Xihai". In 710 the Tang emperor Zhong Zong married Princess Jincheng to the Tibetan king Tride Tzuktzon. The latter wrote a memorial to the Tang emperor Xuan Zong: "I am a nephew of the late

Lake below snowcapped mountains.





emperor. Now I have been honored with a marriage to Princess Jincheng, so we are members of one family now. All the people will live in harmony, and peace and happiness are expected."

In 822, the Tang Dynasty sent envoys to Lhasa on behalf of Emperor Mu Zong to attend the ceremony to form an alliance with the Tibetan king, and a stone tablet was erected to mark the occasion. It expressed the everlasting friendship between the Tibetan and Han peoples. Today this tablet stands before the Zuglakang Monastery in Lhasa.

During the 200 years of Tubo rule in Tibet (634-846), official envoys were exchanged between the two regimes 191 times, and contacts between the two peoples were even more frequent. When the Tang princesses Wencheng and Jincheng entered Tibet, they brought a large number of artisans and craftsmen, and all kinds of books and Han products, introduced advanced production techniques and scientific knowledge to their new home, thus promoting economic and cultural development. To this day Princess Wencheng is respected and praised by the

Tibetans. Many temples have her statue together with her husband, King Songtsan Gambo.

Tibetan culture also flowed into the inland. A Tibetan ball game played on horseback was popular in the Tang Dynasty. Relics discovered in the Dunhuang Grottoes include many classical Tibetan books. Silk, tea and large quantities of advanced tools were transported to Tibet, while Tibet's yaks, leather, furs and medicines went inland. Frequent economic and cultural exchanges brought the Tibetan and Han peoples closer, laying a foundation for Tibet to join the multinational family of the motherland.

In the mid-9th century the Tubo regime collapsed. Tibet was split into many small powers, each fighting the other. For 400 years Tibet was in chaos. During this period, some of the powers submitted to the Song Dynasty, and trade of tea and horses developed. But neither the Song Dynasty nor the rulers of the different powers in Tibet had the ability to unite all Tibet.

It was the Mongol rulers of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) who reunited Tibet and

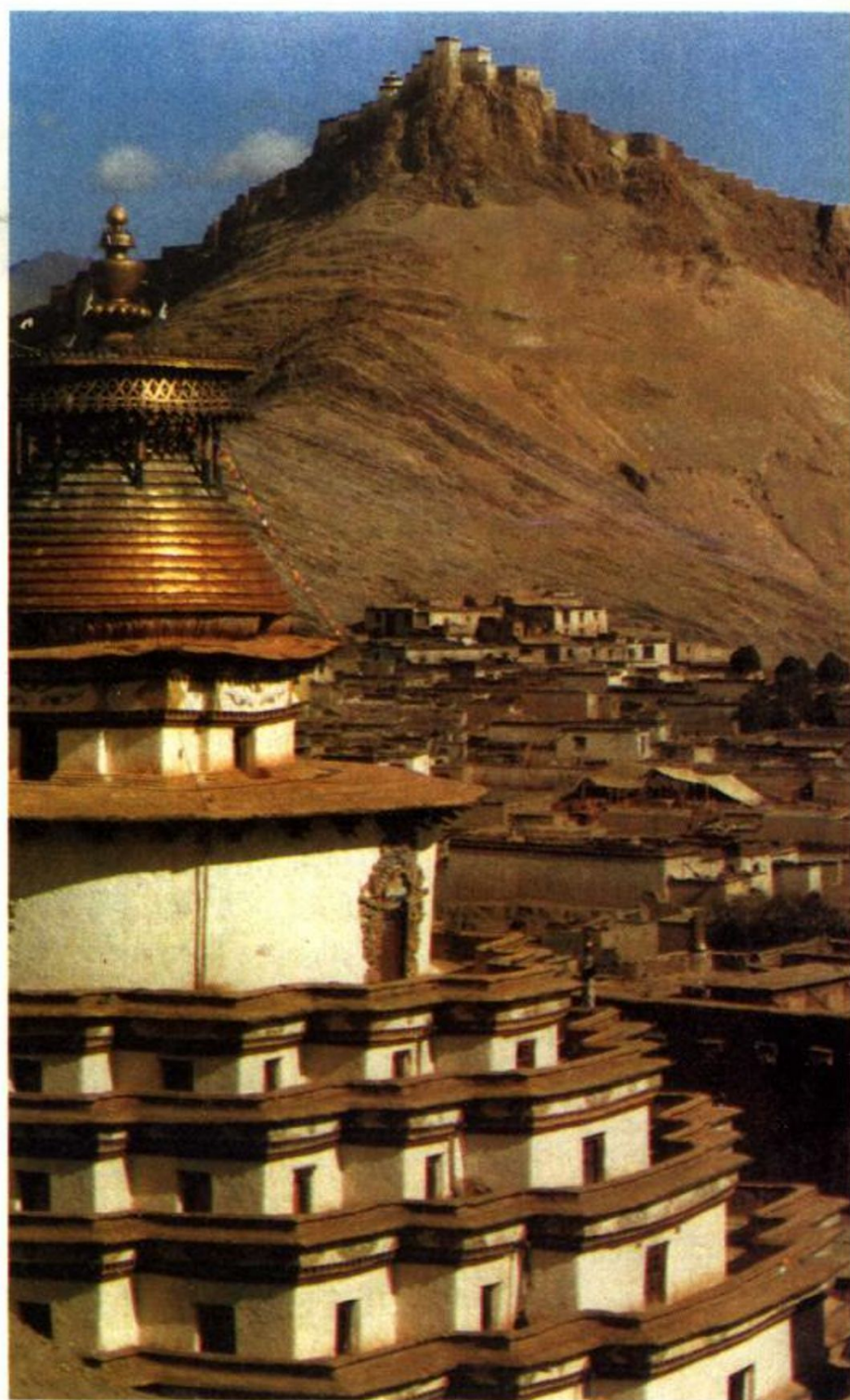
A Tibetan pasture.



ended the four centuries of chaos. In the mid-13th century Kublai Khan sent troops to Tibet, ended the split and incorporated Tibet officially into China's territory. The central government helped the Sakye Sect to build a local political power combining religion with politics, creating a new government system. The religious leader Phags-pa was given the title of governor—"Chief of Thirteen Thousand Households". He also had the title "Imperial Tutor" and for many years served as a high-ranking official in the Yuan government. He helped to create a new written language. The Yuan government also set up an organ to handle Tibetan affairs and sent officials to Tibet to make surveys of the population, designate taxes and levies, build postal stations, and examine local officials. From this time on, China's central government administered Tibet.

The Yuan Dynasty was overthrown in the mid-14th century by the Ming. The new government followed suit in handling Tibetan affairs. The relationship between the Tibetan local regime and the central government became closer. For example, according to the statistics of the Rites Department of the Ming court, in the 1460s Tibetan envoys presenting tribute to Beijing amounted to 3,000-4,000 annually, and non-government economic exchanges were more frequent. During the 300 years of the Ming Dynasty, the two peoples got along well with each other, cooperating to promote the steady development of the country.

In the mid-17th century, when the Manchus overthrew the Ming and established the Qing Dynasty, the new rulers strengthened the administration over Tibet. Emperors Shun Zhi and Kang Xi officially granted the titles of the Fifth Dalai Lama and the Fifth Panchen Lama in 1653 and 1713, making them the top leaders of local government and religion in Tibet. The Qing also stipulated that all generations of Dalai and Panchen must be approved by the central government. More concrete stipulations were made for the functions of the local Tibetan government and organizations. Beginning in 1728, the Qing court sent permanent representatives to Tibet



The White Pagoda in Gyangze.

who, on behalf of the central government, together with the Dalai and Panchen, were in charge of administration, military, judicial, financial and personnel affairs in Tibet. Foreign affairs were the province of the central government. This representative also supervised and presided over the reincarnation of the Dalai, Panchen and other high Living Buddhas.

In 1793 the central government officially issued a 29-article "Ordinance for the More Efficient Governing of Tibet", which prescribed the status and power of the Qing representative to supervise Tibetan affairs and defined other provisions concerning civil administration. This indicated that the Qing

administration over Tibet had reached its highest stage. For nearly a hundred years this ordinance maintained social order and stability in Tibet. Economic and cultural exchanges between the Tibetans and various peoples inland grew. Commercial people came and went continuously. Some Han, Hui, Manchu and Mongolian merchants and travelers entered Tibet and several hundred inlanders settled there. Many vegetables introduced to Tibet are to this day called by their Han names.

Starting in the mid-19th century, the imperialists strengthened their aggression in various parts of China, not even avoiding the "roof of the world". To safeguard China's territorial integrity and sovereignty, the Tibetans, together with the other nationalities of China, waged brave struggles against this. In 1841 the Tibetans repulsed invasions in the Ari area in western Tibet by a foreign force instigated by imperialists. In 1888 and 1904, when British troops directly assaulted Tibet, the people fought bloody battles against them with only primitive weapons. Even the English admitted that "the Tibetans' firmness, wisdom and bravery are preeminent". Because of the corrupt Qing rulers in the central government, the Tibetans' anti-British war was defeated, but they had blocked the imperialists' attempt to use force to colonize Tibet.

After the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, the imperialists changed their strategy. While the inland areas were in civil war they built up pro-imperialism in Tibet's ruling clique, plotting an "independent Tibet". The aim was simply to separate Tibet from China. Opposed by the broad masses of Tibetan working people and patriotic personages from all walks of life, this attempt failed. China's central government maintained its jurisdiction over Tibetan local government. The incarnation and appointment of the 14th Dalai Lama, who is still alive, followed the old regulations, with the approval of the central government, which sent an official to preside over his installation ceremony. Although the relationship between Tibet and the motherland underwent setbacks in the early 20th century, it remained a part of Chinese territory.

THE REBIRTH OF TIBET

On October 1, 1949 the People's Republic of China was founded. On May 23, 1951, negotiations between the representatives of the Tibetan local government and the central people's government led to the Agreement Between the Central People's Government and the Tibetan Local Government on the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet, and Tibet was liberated peacefully. In 1959 the democratic reform was carried out. Serfs and slaves—95 percent of Tibet's population—became the masters of society. Thus Tibet entered a new era. From that time on, Tibet's economy and culture began to develop vigorously. In September 1965 the Tibet Autonomous Region was officially established. Tibet enjoys the full rights of national autonomy in the big family of China.

The special natural environment and the long-term serfdom had left Tibet's economy and culture backward. Thus, the central people's government and various other nationalities have provided deep concern and assistance. Since 1952 the government's financial subsidies to Tibet have reached 9.47 billion yuan, in addition to a special allocation of 1 billion yuan. Millions of tons of production and consumer materials have been transported to Tibet. Thousands of teachers, doctors, scientists, engineers and skilled workers went there to help. With the common effort of Tibetan, Han and other peoples, Tibet has developed greatly in all fields, including animal husbandry, agriculture, industry, education, health and scientific research. The achievements of the past three decades have surpassed those of centuries before. In 1986 the gross industrial and agricultural output value was 842 million yuan. The question of food and clothing, which had not been solved for a thousand years, is no longer a problem.

To help Tibet change its backwardness as quickly as possible, reduce the people's burdens and promote economic development, a series of special policies has been designed for it. Tibet has entered a new era.

ANCIENT LHASA

Lhasa is the highest city in the world (3,650 meters). It lies on the north bank of the Lhasa River, a tributary of the great Yarlung Zangbo River. One third of the year it enjoys clear sunshine. It is one of the few cities in the world with clean, pure air.

"BUDDHA LAND"

Before the 7th century, Lhasa was only wet land used as pasture by the Sump tribe. Their neighbors were the Shangshong people. Then the Yarlung tribe swept in and conquered the local tribes. Its leader, the great strategist, Songtsan Gambo, made his capital here in 633, established the Tubo Kingdom, and went on to unify the whole of Tibet.

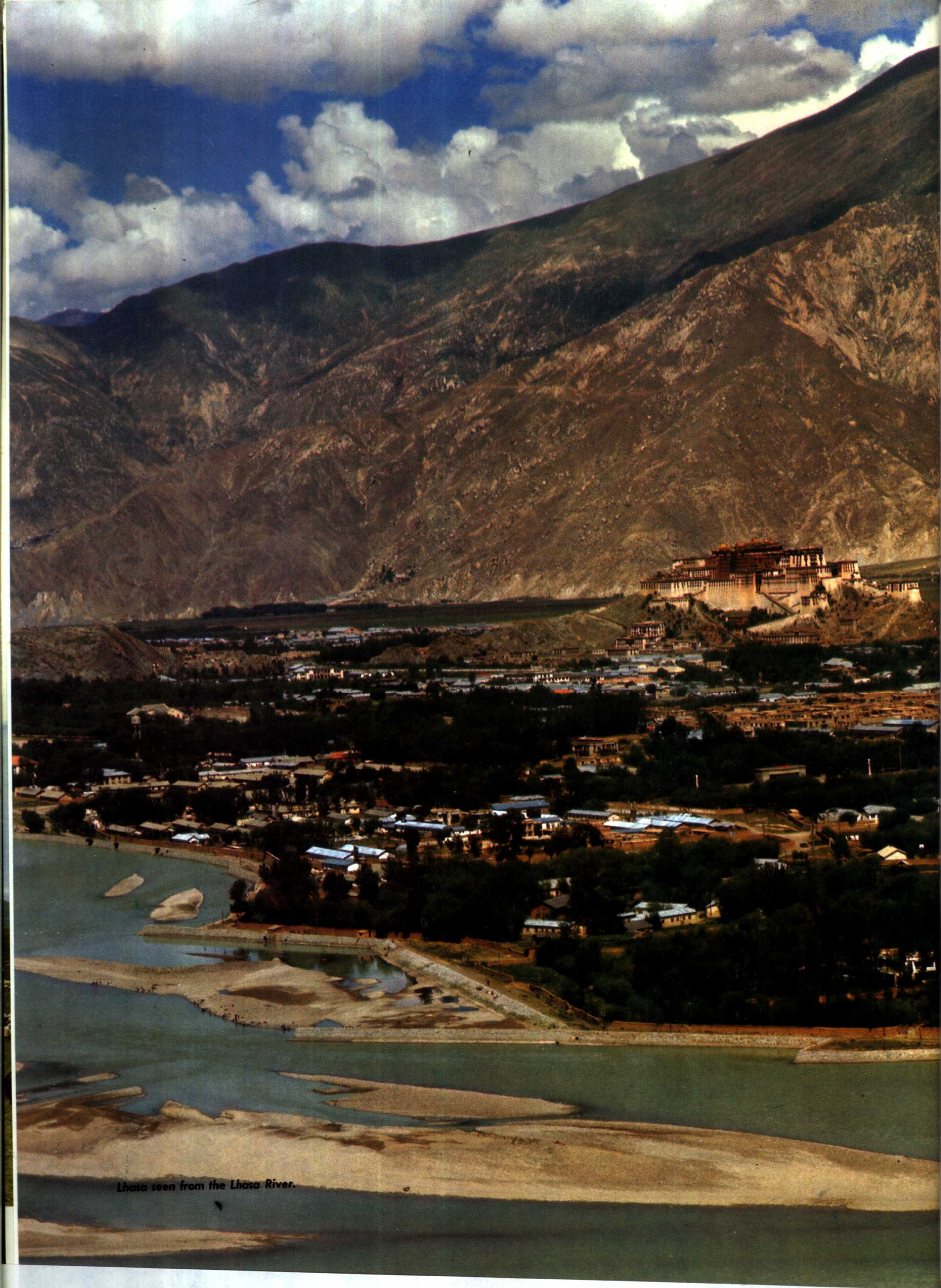
It was a simple and crude capital. When he married the Tang princess Wencheng in 641, there wasn't even a hall to house the statue of the Buddha the princess brought, and it was placed in a tent in the forest. But the arrival of the princess began the energetic building of what was to become Lhasa. In 647 she chose a site for a monastery and designed it herself. Thus the founding of the Zuglakang Monastery, now famous around the world. Around the new monastery grew some inns, a few stores, a handicraft shop or two, and residences—the beginnings of today's Octagon Street. Gradually, eight lanes radiated out from Octagon Street, and this was the first city. The name "Lhasa" didn't appear until the early 9th century. The town was growing, and

Lhasa—"the holy land of Buddha" in Tibetan—began to have significance.

The Zuglakang Monastery, now in the center of Lhasa, only had one hall in the beginning. Expansion through the centuries has brought it to a complex of 25,000 square meters. Its architecture is Tibetan in traditional wood and stone, its layout resembling the *siheyuan* of Beijing, a compound with houses around the courtyard. The early structures used the Tang system of brackets inserted between the top of a pillar and a crossbeam. Each bracket consisted of a double bow-shaped arm called a *gong*, which supports a block of wood called a *dou* on each side, and a caisson ceiling. The main hall has four tiers. The roof supports four gilded bronze turrets. There are also gilded wheels, pennants, lotus throne and "eight treasures". The gold glistens in the sun and the scene is magnificent.

In the center of the main hall is a sitting statue of Sakyamuni at twelve years old, said to have been brought by Princess Wencheng from the Tang capital at Chang'an. Amid the fragrance of incense, it is worshipped the year round. On the second floor are statues of Songtsan Gambo and Princess Wencheng, and Princess Balsatrizon of Nepal. Songtsan Gambo's left index finger wears a ring inlaid with precious stone said to have been given him by Princess Wencheng at their wedding.

A tree in front of the monastery is known as the "Tang Dynasty willow" or "Princess willow", supposedly planted by her. Unfortu-



Lhasa seen from the Lhasa River.