



# The Historical Status of TIBET

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By TIEH-TSENG LI

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

RESUMING STUDY after having spent twenty years in a service where one was accustomed to dispose of matters lightheartedly as "academic" has made me realize how heavy academic work actually is. The burden of the work was increased by difficulties experienced in adjusting myself to academic life in a foreign country at an age of well over forty; and at the back of my mind throughout has been an awareness of the condition of my country, an awareness which keeps every Chinese abroad from devoting himself wholeheartedly to the task in hand. However, the book has been completed within a comparatively short time, thanks to the encouragement and guidance so generously given by Professors L. Carrington Goodrich, Leland M. Goodrich, Philip C. Jessup, Nathaniel Peffer, and C. Martin Wilbur. To them I wish to register here my deep gratitude. Thanks are also due to a fellow graduate student, Mr. D. M. Hill, who has read through the manuscript and made valuable suggestions to improve the text; and to my friends the Honorable K. T. Chou, formerly Chairman of the Commission for the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs, and Mr. C. H. Yuan, for their help in collecting some data from Taiwan. The book would never have attained its present stage without the ready assistance given by the staffs of the Columbia University Libraries, the Library of Congress, and the Oriental Section of the New York Public Library. Its publication was aided by a grant from the National Tsing Hua University which covered a part of the production cost.

TIEH-TSENG LI

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DEDICATED TO  
S. R. C.  
WHO TAUGHT ME MY FIRST LESSON  
IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
I. FOREIGN RELATIONS UP TO THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY	5
The Earliest Contact	5
Definite Relations First Established	6
Matrimonial Alliances and Their Effect on the Religions of Tibet	8
The Extent of Chinese Influence	9
Status at This Time Difficult to Define in Modern Terms	12
II. TIBET AS A VASSAL STATE	18
Conquest by the Mongols	18
Tibet as a Theocracy	19
An Indian Attack	23
Chyañ-chhub as Undisputed Master	24
The Founding of the Ming Dynasty and Its Relation to Tibet	25
The Yellow Sect and the Ming Dynasty	28
The Status of Tibet	32
III. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF CHINESE SOVEREIGNTY IN TIBET	33
From Occupation by the Khoshote-Mongols to the Recognition of the Suzerainty of the Manchu Court	33
Events Leading to the First Campaign	37
The First Campaign and Its Consequences on Tibetan Status	39
Events Prior to the Second Expedition	41

The Effect on the Status of Tibet	43
Events Leading to the Third Expedition	46
Changes in the Status of Tibet after the Third Expedition	48
Events Leading to the Conquest of Nepal	51
Exercise of Full Chinese Sovereignty in Tibet	53
Imperial Authority on the Decline	59
China Attempts to Resume Full Sovereignty in Tibet	65
 IV. TIBET AS A BUFFER STATE	 70
Early Contact with the West	70
Futile Efforts of the English to Open Tibet	71
Tibetan Reaction to the Approach of the British	75
Events Leading to the British Expedition	79
Lord Curzon's Altered or Forward Policy	81
Dispatch of the British Armed Mission	87
Lhasa Reached and a Convention Imposed	92
The Convention Amended in Deference to London Authority	97
The New Status Created by the Lhasa Arrangement	101
Chinese Adherence to the Lhasa Convention	107
Trade Regulations Signed by Anglo-Chinese Plenipotentiaries and the Tibetan Delegate	114
Trade Regulations Signed by Anglo-Chinese Plenipotenti-Russian Convention	118
The Anglo-Russian Convention's Effect on British-Russian Mutual Dealings and Respective Conduct	124
 V. TIBET UNDER THE REPUBLICAN REGIME	 130
Negotiations Leading to the Simla Conference	130
The Simla Conference and Its Failure	135
Renewed Bargaining between Russia and Britain	142
Renewed Negotiations under British Pressure	144
The Panch'en Lama's Flight to China Proper	147
The Dalai Lama Turning Strongly Away from Britain toward China	148

The Chinese National Government's Effort toward Rap- prochement	150
The Dalai Lama's Answer to the Eight Questions	153
Armed Conflict Initiated by the Ta-chieh Ssu Incident	156
The Chinese National Government Not in a Position to Force the Issue	159
The Truce with Sikang Signed in 1932 and with Ch'inghai in 1933	164
Agreement to Halt the Armed Conflict Resumed after the Dalai Lama's Death	167
General Huang's Mission to Tibet	168
The Panch'en Lama's Plan to Return and His Death	172
Wu Chung-hsin's Mission to Officiate at the Installation of the Present Dalai Lama	180
The Setting Up in Lhasa of a Permanent Office by the National Government	185
The Pro-British Young-Tibet Group Coming to Power	187
Tibetan Participation in the Chinese National Assembly	190
The Installation of the Tenth Panch'en Lama	191
The Status of Tibet Affected by World War II	193
Chinese Nationalist Officials Ousted by the Lhasa Au- thorities	198
A Diplomatic Duel between Peking and New Delhi	202
Tibet's Appeal to the United Nations	203
The Peking Agreement on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet	206
The Sino-Indian Pact on Tibet	210
CONCLUSION	211
NOTES	219
BIBLIOGRAPHY	291
INDEX	307



## INTRODUCTION

TO MANY PEOPLE Tibet is a land of mystery, remote and inaccessible. Possibly this is due in part to the difficulty an Occidental encounters in trying to understand its system of government, a system theocratic in form and coupled with a social structure which seems to resemble, yet is essentially different from, the feudal and aristocratic society of medieval Europe. But the deep mystery enshrouding Tibet must be attributed not only to its remoteness and comparative inaccessibility, but also, and in a greater degree, to a lack of information, even positive misinformation concerning this so-called hidden land in the snow mountains.

Even Tibet's boundaries cause confusion. First of all a distinction has to be made between the Tibet of history and the area we call Tibet on our maps, which, unfortunately, do not always demarcate the actual domain over which the Lhasa authority is exercised. For a time Tibet extended its control eastward over a part of Ch'inghai and Kansu, and most of Sikang, as well as some districts in Yünnan; and ruled the western frontier states of Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan, where even today Tibetans constitute an important part of the population and exercise a considerable cultural influence. An ethnologist would draw the ethnic boundary of Tibet further east to the Chengtu plain in the heart of the province of Szechwan, and further west to the Zo-Gi-La pass, only a little more than thirty-five miles east of Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir.<sup>1</sup>

The boundary problem however appears simple by comparison with the complexities of the subject of this book—the status of Tibet. In the first place, the status of a nation is not a matter of how that nation regards itself, or even how another nation regards it: status is to be found somewhere in the relations which

obtain between the nation in question and all the other nations which may affect it and which it may affect. In the second place, the status of a nation is something which changes through a process of time in relation to each of the nations concerned with it, and the nations themselves are changing too. In the third place, in making a historical study of the status of Tibet, reliance has to be placed on sources other than Tibetan.

The Tibetans lack a sense of history as understood by other peoples. The number of their historical works known to the outside world is by no means small—as early as 1838 the great Hungarian traveler and scholar, Alexander Csoma de Körös, enumerated a long list of them.<sup>2</sup> They are, however, histories of a religion rather than chronicles of a people. The reason is that as the authors were lamas, they considered the greatest events in the reign of a king to be his gifts to monasteries and his building of chortens. Other events such as military campaigns, for instance, are either ignored or only referred to briefly. As Sir Charles Bell remarked, "History, unless it centers on religion, does not appeal to the Tibetan mind."<sup>3</sup> In other words, Tibetan annals are to the history of Tibet what Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* is to the history of England.

Not only are the Tibetan annals devoid of critical perspective; ? they conflict with one another. For example, Woodville Rockhill pointed out at one place, "Csoma, Sanang Setsen and Sarat Chandra Das, our chief authorities, do not agree on any one date."<sup>4</sup> S. W. Bushell also commented in his article in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, "In *Georgii Alphabetum Tibetanum*, Schmidt's translation of Sanang Setsen, Csoma de Körös' *Tibetan Grammar* and Emil Schlagintweit's *Könige von Tibet*, the genealogical lists differ very widely both from each other and from the dates of the Chinese T'ang Histories."<sup>5</sup>

For foreign sources of information we naturally turn to the neighboring countries of Tibet. *The Cambridge History of India*, commenting on Indian literature of the early days, makes the remark: "As records of political progress they are deficient. By their aid alone it would be impossible to sketch the outline of the political history of any one of the nations of India before the Muhammadan Conquest."<sup>6</sup> We cannot, therefore, gather any

substantial information from Indian sources that will throw light on the earlier status of Tibet.

Another neighboring country, with which Tibet has been brought into closer contact than with India, is Nepal, and here again we find ourselves on equally barren ground. "Nepal possesses numerous local chronicles, which are, however, of little historical value for the early period, and their chronology, when it can be checked, is unreliable."<sup>7</sup>

Chinese records thus become, for the early period at least, the only foreign sources from which we can draw information having a bearing on the status of Tibet. Western writers on Tibet have, as a rule, preferred Chinese records, the accuracy and authenticity of which are generally recognized. Nonetheless no one would deny that there are valuable historical data in Tibetan records, and it is not to be supposed that the Chinese records are entirely without error.

The fact that very often the only adequate records are Chinese is both an advantage and a disadvantage to the writer; an advantage because with his knowledge of Chinese he can go direct to the records themselves without having to rely on secondary sources; a disadvantage because being Chinese it might be supposed that he is biased, that he is already predisposed to the Chinese point of view on those occasions where a possible doubt exists. Some might consider this predisposition to be reinforced by a fact made more and more clear as the book progresses, namely, that taking the period from when the earliest records begin, right down to the present day, the country which has been the most involved with Tibet, and whose interests have been the most closely connected with those of Tibet to a point where the one has been regarded in the official dispatches of foreign countries as a province of the other, is China.

Such criticism however might be tempered by the consideration that the substance of the book was presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Ph.D. at Columbia University, where, presumably, excessive bias would have been discountenanced. Further, the writer would like to put on record the fact that whilst engaged on this work, he has endeavored to be as impartial as possible. No man can rid himself of every source

of error in judgment, though Descartes liked to think he had; but if he puts the desire for truth above other desires, he has, if accused of partiality, provided grounds for extenuation if not for acquittal. 多就其罪 評輕

The writer has been very conscious of the difficulties involved in embarking on this study. He felt impelled to continue with it because among the very few books dealing with political aspects of Tibet, none has been concerned primarily with the question of status—of all questions regarding Tibet perhaps the least known and most misunderstood.

## CHAPTER I

# FOREIGN RELATIONS UP TO THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

### *The Earliest Contact*

ACCORDING to Chinese writers, contact was established between China and Tibet as early as 2220 B.C., when the Emperor Shun drove the San-meau tribesmen into a region called San-wei, the location of which was not indicated at the time.<sup>1</sup> In a decree of 1720 A.D., the learned Emperor Shêng-tsu told the scholars of his court that after many years of intensive study he came to the conclusion that San-wei constituted three parts of Tibet.<sup>2</sup> There is, however, still much doubt among Chinese scholars as well as Western Sinologists as to the accuracy of the Emperor's conclusion. Western Sinologists nowadays dismiss data and dates from Chinese literature about the third millennium B.C. as of almost no value. Unless written materials like bronzes and oracle bones, of an earlier period than those now available, come to light, they will not, of course, accept such assertions at all.

In the histories of the Chinese dynasties Shang (ca. 1523-1028 B.C.; Chinese traditional chronology assigns to the Shàng dynasty the dates 1765-1123 B.C.), Chou (ca. 1027-256 B.C.), Han (202 B.C.-220 A.D.), Tsin (265-420), and Sui (589-618), there are stray references to tribes named Jung or Ch'iang,<sup>3</sup> who are identified by Chinese historians as peoples of Tibet. But whether they were ancestors of present Tibetans is an open question.

Tibetan records of the corresponding periods contain references to China or the Chinese. *Dub-thah-leg-shad sel-kyi mélon*<sup>4</sup> mentioned a Chinese sage, Leg-tan-man, in the early years of the Bon religion.<sup>5</sup> During the reign of Namri-sron-tsan, or Gnam-ri slon mchan,<sup>6</sup> who ascended the throne of Tibet in the latter part

of the sixth century, the Tibetans obtained their first knowledge of arithmetic and medicine from the Chinese.<sup>7</sup>

### *Definite Relations First Established*

Definite relations, however, were not established until the T'ang dynasty (618-907). It was during the period of this dynasty<sup>8</sup> that no fewer than one hundred missions went from one country to the other.<sup>9</sup> Some were sent to announce the death of a sovereign or to tender congratulations on auspicious occasions. Others were either missions of tribute from Tibet to the Emperor of China, or missions bearing presents to the Tsanpu of Tibet from the Emperor. Most of them, however, were sent to sue for peace, renew friendly relations, and settle boundaries, or to conclude sworn treaties or matrimonial alliances. The close contact may be seen from the fact that in the second and eleventh months of the year 805 two missions were sent from China to Tibet and in the seventh and tenth months of the same year two missions were sent from Tibet to China. The Tibetan manuscripts found at Tunhuang, which give a very succinct year-by-year account of the great events from A.D. 650-747, record the receiving of Chinese envoys by the Tibetan King in every year from 729-37 and 742-44, besides the earlier references to Chinese missions.<sup>10</sup>

The two countries were often at war—one side being victorious at one time and the other at another—and frontier conflicts were common. Once the Tibetans led by a traitor general named Kao Hui entered the Chinese imperial capital, Ch'ang-an, and occupied it for fifteen days (763 A.D.). One (?) Tibetan record reports (and this may be a later interpolation) that the Chinese captured the Tibetan capital, Lhasa, after the death of Sron-tsan Gampo.<sup>11</sup> It is significant that neither the Chinese historical annals nor the highly important Tibetan manuscripts found at Tunhuang mention a Chinese capture of Lhasa.

In spite of the frequent armed conflicts, diplomatic relations were, more often than not, maintained between the two countries. On the deaths of the Tsanpus Ch'i-tsung-lung-tsan in 650, Chilipapu in 679, Ch'инуhsilung in 705, Ch'ilisulungliehtsan in 755, Mukhri-bcan-po in 804, name omitted in 817,<sup>12</sup> and Tamo,

also known as Glang Dhama or Landarma, in 842, the Chinese Emperor was informed.<sup>13</sup> He sent special envoys to convey his condolences, or to offer sacrifices, or to participate in the ceremonies at funerals. Sometimes he went into mourning and closed the court for one to three days.

The Tibetans were likewise informed of the deaths of the Chinese emperors and of the accessions of their successors in 805 and 820. Missions to offer condolences on the deaths of the emperors and to make sacrifices at the funerals were sent from Tibet. The 805 mission, moreover, brought gold, silver, robes, oxen, and horses as offerings for the mausoleum of Te-tsung who reigned from 780-805.<sup>14</sup>

Eight treaties were solemnly and ceremoniously signed during this period. The first was concluded during the reign of Chung-tsung (705-10),<sup>15</sup> the second, known as the treaty of Ch'ih-ling, in 730, the third in 756, the fourth in 765, the fifth in 766, the sixth, known as the treaty of Ch'ing-shui, in 783,<sup>16</sup> the seventh in 784, and the eighth in 821.

In addition to these, a ceremony of swearing a treaty was treacherously broken up by the Tibetans at Ping-liang in 787. The treaty of 783 and the treaty signed in Ch'ang-an in 821 and confirmed at Lhasa by religious ceremonies in the following year were inscribed on stone pillars in front of the large temple, called by the Chinese Ta-chao-ssu, in the city of Lhasa. Bushell made a facsimile of part of the 821 pillar. A translation from the Tibetan text was appended to Sir Charles Bell's *Tibet*.<sup>17</sup> *Shên chou kuo kuang chi* (Shanghai, 1909), No. 7, reproduced the four sides of the pillar in two plates accompanied by Lo Chên-yü's (1866-1940) article in which the author added in print a transcript of the entire Chinese portion of the monument, inclusive of the thirty-four names so far as decipherable.<sup>18</sup> 滿解

These relations were strengthened by military assistance from Tibet. In 648 Tibet sent an army in collaboration with 7,000 cavalry from Nepal to support the Chinese envoy, Wang Hsüan-ts'e, in subduing the usurper of Magadha. The latter was taken prisoner and brought to Ch'ang-an.<sup>19</sup> In 784 Tibet offered its troops to help settle the difficulties of the State of China. A Chinese envoy was therefore sent to Tibet to devise a plan of cam-

paign, and the joint army recovered the capital, Ch'ang-an, and relieved Feng-tien, in which the Emperor was besieged.

*Matrimonial Alliances and Their Effect on the  
Religions of Tibet*

To strengthen the bond of neighborly friendship, two matrimonial alliances were made. In 641 Emperor T'ai-tsung gave the Princess Wên-ch'êng of the Imperial House in marriage to the celebrated Tsanpu Ch'i-tsung-lung-tsan. In 703 the ruling Empress Wu-tsê-t'ien granted the request of Tsanpu Ch'inuhsilung for a matrimonial alliance, but the latter died during the war with Nepal and P'o-lo-mên (Brâhmana), and the marriage did not take place. In 710 the Emperor Chung-tsung gave his adopted daughter with the title of Princess Chin-ch'eng in marriage to Tsanpu Ch'ilisutsan. Thus, the two courts had been united by marriages which, according to the treaty of 783, had, by the time of its signing, established a nephew-uncle relationship for nearly two hundred years<sup>20</sup>—an exaggeration of at least fifty years.

The Tibetan record<sup>21</sup> registered the marriage of Ch'i-tsung-lung-tsan and Princess Wên-ch'êng, but gave the name of the Tsanpu as Sron-tsan Gampo. Ch'i-tsung-lung-tsan was probably a transcription of his name prior to his accession (that is Khri-dan-srong-btsan).<sup>22</sup> The name of the princess was given as Hun-shin. The record also registered the marriage of the Tsanpu Khri-lde gtsug btsan mes Ag-ts'oms and Princess Kyim-shan, daughter of the Chinese Emperor Wai-jun. This must have been the marriage between Ch'ilisutsan and Princess Chin-ch'eng, as the Chinese name gives a quite correct pronunciation of the first four syllables of this Tibetan name, and Kyim-shan is only a different rendering of Chin-ch'eng.<sup>23</sup> But the story of the engagement and marriage is very different from the account in *T'ang shu*. The *Documents de Touen-Houang*, which began its record from 650, mentioned the earlier (641) arrival of the Princess Wên-ch'êng (the name was rendered as Mun-čhañ) and revealed the fact that she did not live together with the King until six years of their marriage had elapsed. The *Documents* records the arrival of the Princess Kim-san in 710, which agrees with *T'ang shu*. Other Mongolian and Tibetan accounts, as those of Sanang Set-



sen, *Bodhimur*,<sup>24</sup> and the *Mani Bkah-hbum*,<sup>25</sup> although they distort many of the related facts, agree substantially with the Chinese record as far as the marriage itself is concerned.<sup>26</sup>

These two weddings had a remarkable effect upon the religions of Tibet. The two Chinese princesses and, in the case of Wên-ch'êng, jointly with a Nepalese princess whom her husband married, exerted great influence in the propagation of Buddhism in that country.<sup>27</sup> In his book on Buddhism, M. V. Vassilief quotes the Tibetan historian, Buston, as saying that "at the beginning the Chinese Kachanna were the guides of the Tibetans in Buddhism."<sup>28</sup> The Princess Wên-ch'êng is regarded by the Tibetans as the incarnation of the Divine Mother (Tara) and her image in the famous Ta-chao-ssu is still an object of worship.<sup>29</sup>

### *The Extent of Chinese Influence*

The facts related in the present and following paragraphs show the extent of the Chinese influence in Tibet. "As the Princess disliked their custom of painting their faces red, Lung-tsan [Ch'i-tsung-lung-tsan] ordered his people to put a stop to the practice, and it was no longer done. He also discarded his felt and skins, put on brocade and silk, and gradually copied Chinese civilization. He also sent the children of his chiefs and of rich men to request admittance into the national schools to be taught the classics, and invited learned scholars from China to compose his official reports to the Emperor."<sup>30</sup> He later asked for silkworms' eggs, mortars and presses for making wine, and for workmen to manufacture paper and ink and to construct water mills. All these requests were granted, and in addition a calendar was sent.<sup>31</sup> The *T'ang hui yao*<sup>32</sup> records that he asked the Emperor for workmen to manufacture writing-brushes. In this connection it is interesting to note that the Tibetans actually employ for writing a wooden or bamboo stylus in the same manner as the ancient Chinese did prior to the invention of the brush.

In giving away the Princess Chin-ch'êng, the Emperor Chung-tsung sent as a dowry several tens of thousands of pieces of brocaded and plain silk, various kinds of apparatus with skilled workmen, and Chin-ts'ŭ musical instruments. The Princess asked for a copy of the classical works *Mao-shih*, *Li-chi*, *Tso-chuan*, and