

Tibet: A Game of Shadow

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Abstract

This research paper is a problem based oriented mainly Tibet's issue and problems of Tibetans settled in India and other parts of the world have attracted international attention. It has also drawn the interest of statesmen, academicians, social and political activists as well as the media, as it constitutes an important part of contemporary peace and conflict resolution studies. Scholars in the western and other parts of the world are also engaged in studying the complexities of the question and issue of stateless people. The main objective of this paper is trying to find out the status of relations between Tibet and China and trying to make a clear concept between both.

Key Words: *Tibet, stateless, attention, contemporary, social, peace, resolution, conflict*

Introduction

The present study mainly focuses on the issue of Tibet. The problem with the historical arguments is that history can be interpreted in many different ways and China rests her case against Tibet solely on her historical interpretation that Tibet has always been a part of China and therefore concludes that Tibet has no right to determine its future. From the middle to the later part of the twentieth century, Tibet a land shrouded in mystery and spirituality became a subject of interest, research and discussion among the travelers, scholars, policy makers and the colonial powers. Later on the occupation of Tibet by the Communist China made it a contentious issue. The Chinese occupation of Tibet, a resource rich and water tower of Asia, is a serious issue of concern for India. As due to its strategic location it used to be a buffer state between India and China and was important for India's security, but with the loss of Tibet this advantage is also lost. Chinese occupation of Tibet and Tibet's liberation is a subject of debate in the global politics. The world opinion is in fact so much divided that, even in the 21st century, there seems to be no structural solution to this question.¹

At the heart of the Tibet Question lies the challenge of protecting the traditions and nationality, and a clash of cultures with the slippage of the tectonic plates joining two different civilizations. Tibet is a Central or South Asian culture, falling within the Indian sphere of historical influence. On the other hand the East Asian societies such as those of Japan and Korea are mostly similar to China. These Asian societies are influenced by Confucianism and Buddhism and are more authoritarian and centralized than non-Confucian Asian societies. Due to such similarities these societies form the sphere of China's cultural and historical influence, but traditional Tibetan society being different from traditional Chinese society, was not the part of Chinese cultural and social set up. Tibet was more decentralized, with the influence of local lords and internal power structures.²

The Chinese exercise of power in Tibet has ranged from mild dominance, to extreme forms of direct political intervention and domination, as the communist did elsewhere. After having been cautioned about the general use of the term sovereignty in pre- nation- state political discourse, one must admit that Sino-Tibetan relations did share several features of tribute relations that characterized the Middle Kingdom's hierarchical relations with other players in the Sino-centric world system. Tribute relations as a cultural contract between China and Tibet may be conceived as honoring a system in which the Son of Heaven, seen as cosmic figure is acknowledged and privileged by the other rulers who may be less powerful than the Middle Kingdom. This was principally a relationship of China's relations with other Buddhist countries. Tribute relations were developed in the middle of the thirteenth century.³

Buddhism has played a vital role in the progress of Tibetan, Mongol, and Manchu cultures, and partly because almost all native historian of the country were Buddhist monks, therefore, the sphere of Buddhism finds an important place in the history of Tibet. According to historical and mythological accounts the Tibetan plateau was established at least twenty one thousand years ago and the original Tibetan settlers were replaced around 3,000 BP by immigrants from northern China.⁴

The Tibetans call themselves Bod-pa, which means "people living in the Bod region". It is believed that the name Bod is derived from the name Bon, an animist religion followed by Tibetans at the seventh century A.D. At the beginning of the seventh century a strong Tufan Dynasty was established in Lahasa, one of the several local dynasties under the Tang Dynasty. The subjects of the Tufan (Tibet) Dynasty founded by King Songtsan Gampo (605 CE to 841 CE) were none other than those of Tibetan nationality in ancient times, The rule of Tang Dynasty was very popular and authoritative particularly, in politics, economics and military force. The rule of Tang Dynasty between 618 and 907 AD is known as a golden era of China, because of its various developments.⁵

According to Tibetan annals, the first King of Tibet ruled from 127 BC, but it was only in the seventh century AD that Tibet emerged as a unified state and a mighty empire under Emperor Songtsen Gampo. With his rule, an era of political and military greatness and territorial expansion started that lasted for three centuries. The King of Nepal and the Emperor of China offered their daughters to the Tibetan Emperor in marriage. The wedding to the Nepalese and Chinese princesses were of particular importance, because they played important roles in the spread of Buddhism in Tibet.⁶

In 779 A.D King Tirsong Detsen invited the Buddhist masters Santarakshita and Padmasambava from India to establish the first Buddhist monastery at Samye. During the second half of the eighth century and the first half of the ninth century, Tibet continued to expand into Chinese territory. After 850 A.D the Buddhist- Bon rivalries split Tibet into small warring Kingdoms, but the eleventh century saw the re-introduction of Buddhism and the development of monastic life. This was Tibet's imperial period, and the dynasty lasted for two centuries. This era marked the beginning of diplomatic relations between China and Tibet and also confirmed that China and Tibet were separate states. During this time, Tibet's borders expanded to include Xinjiang province in the north, parts of modern Ladakh and Kashmir in the west, and in the east, Amdo and Kham (parts of today's Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces, and its population also expanded in the southwest China and northeast India. Before the expansion of Tibetan

imperial empire, parts of these territories were under Chinese subordination. A stone pillar in Lhasa memorialized these events. Buddhism came to Tibet in the ninth century and found it in conflict with the native Bon religion and ultimately the religious conflict caused the end of the Tibetan dynasty.⁷

The first externally confirmed contact of China with the Tibetan Kingdom in the recorded history of Tibet occurred when King Namri Longstan sent an ambassador to China in the early 7th century, marking the appearance of Tibet on the international scene. Traditionally, Tibetan history preserves a lengthy list of rulers, whose exploits became subject to external verification in the Chinese histories by the 7th century. From the 7th to the 11th century a series of emperors ruled Tibet and the power of the empire gradually increased from the time of the emperor Songtsen Gampo over a diverse terrain and by the beginning of the 9th century, its influence extended up to Bengal in south and as far north as Mongolia in the north.⁸

Tibet's relations with Mangol: 1240-1350

The Mangol ruler Genghis Khan and his successors conquered vast territories in Asia and Europe creating one of the largest empires the world has ever known, stretching from the Pacific to Eastern Europe. In 1207, the Tangut Empire north of Tibet fell to the advancing Mangols, and in 1271, the Mangols announced the establishment of The Mangol Yuan Dyansty to rule the eastern part of the Empire. By 1279, the Chinese Song dynasty in southern China fell before the advancing armies and the Mangols completed their conquest of China.

Religious relationship has been a major factor between close Tibet and China relations particularly since medieval times, the rulers of Buddhist Mongolia, who saw themselves as protectors of Tibet. When the Mangols were strong Tibet had no Chinese interference and it was independent. China was conquered by Genghis Khan's general Subedei and his two youngest sons, Ogedei and Tolui. The conquest was taken to conclusion by Tolui's son Kublia, who founded the Mangol dynasty, when he became the Khan of eastern part of the Mongol empire, which by 1260 included Mongolia, Manchuiya, Korea, Tibet and all of northern and central China.⁹

Today, China claims the Yuan Dynasty to be its own because, by doing so, it also lays claim to all Mangol conquest, at least in the eastern half of the Mangol Empire. Prince Goden, grandson of Genghis Khan, dispatched an expedition to Tibet in 1240 and invited one of Tibet's leading religious hierarchies, Sakya Pandit Kunga Gyaltsen to his court, thus establishing an enduring Tibetan- Mangol relationship. Here began the unique Cho-Yon (priest-patron) relationship. Kublai Khan, who succeeded Goden Khan, embraced Tibetan Buddhism and adopted Drogon Choegyal Phagpa, nephew of Skaya Pandit, as his spiritual mentor. Kublai Khan offered his Tibetan Lama political authority over Tibet in 1254, conferring various titles on him. These early Cho-Yon relationship were followed by many similar relationship between Mongol princes or Tibetan families and Tibetan Lamas. This was evident in the Mongol – Tibetan relationship, which continued to exist even –after the fall of the Yuan Dynasty.

Tibet broke its political relationship with the Mangols in 1350 when the Tibetan King, Jangchup Gyaltsen replaced the Skaya Lamas as the most powerful ruler of Tibet. Jangchup Gyaltsen did away with Mongol influence in the Tibetan administrative system and introduced a

new and distinctly Tibetan one. He also enacted a Code of Law (Trimying Shelchey Cho-n ga, 15 Article Code), for the administration of justice in the Kingdom. The Chinese regained their independence from Mangol rule and established the Ming dynasty 18 years after that. The Ming Dynasty replaced the Yuan Dynasty in China and inherited the right to rule Tibet. The Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), through its administration and policy, brought Tibetan society a long period of relative stability.¹⁰

Relations with Chinese Emperors: 1368-1644

During the mid-14th century the Sakya government gradually declined. The Pagmo Gagyü Sect headed Qamqoi Gyaincain came to power, following the system of temporal and religious administration. Yuan rulers accepting the fact gave Qamqoi Gyaincain the Title of Grand Minister of Education. In 1368, the Ming Dynasty replaced the Yuan Dynasty in China, and inherited the right to rule Tibet, Though; Central government of the Ming dynasty retained most of the titles and ranks of official positions instituted during the Yuan dynasty.

After the fall of the Yuan Dynasty and the rise of Ming Dynasty for almost a millennium China experienced foreign rule by Asian conquerors from the former tribute states. The Ming (1368-1644) was the only Han Chinese Dynasty to preside over China for a very long period until the fall of the dynastic system in 1911, (a period of 277 years), it is no small wonder then that both Chinese Nationalists and Chinese Communists had Chinese unity as a primary goal of their regimes. The Ming dynasty presided over a period of cultural glory and economic prosperity in China. The Ming Dynasty expanded urban society and presided over burgeoning commercial expansion. It was justly proud of a flowing culture. Its territory was smaller, about half the size of that later conquered by Qing dynasty. In 1639, the Qing court had sent a special envoy to Tibet inviting high monks Manchu and Mangol areas for preaching. The Manchu planned to make use of Lama's faith to get the people's support for consolidation and unification of China.¹¹

Relations with Manchu: 1639-1911

The Qing Dynasty replaced the Ming Dynasty in 1644, the new Central Government increased control over Tibet, bringing increased systemization and an expanded legal framework. In 1642, the Great Fifth Dalai Lama, with the help of his Mongol Patron Gushri Khan, became the supreme political and religious ruler of unified Tibet. Since then, Tibetans accepted him as their "Gongsa Chempo" or "the Supreme Sovereign". The Fifth Dalai Lama established a close relationship with the Mongols and maintained close relationship with Manchu rulers. Manchu Emperor Tai Tsung invited the Dalai Lama to his capital, Mukden. The priest-patron relationship between the Dalai Lama and the Manchu rulers was established.

Throughout the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), relations between Tibet and the Manchu Emperors remained formally based on the Cho-Yon (priest-patron) relationship. The priest-patron relationship coexisted with Tibet's political subordination to Yuan and the Qing. There is simply nothing to confirm the conception that the priest-patron relationship expanded the political domination. It existed between Tibetan hierarchs and emperors of the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, including periods in which the Ming and Qing did not exercise authority over Tibet. It has become common for Tibetan exile commentators to see the relationship as exclusively

personal and ideas of Tibet's subordination to Yuan or Ming emperors as a misunderstanding of that fact.

However, the exceptional assault of Tibet by Manchu troops in 1908 was a turning point in relations between Tibet and Manchu Emperor. When the Manchu Emperor tried to depose the Dalai Lama in 1910, the Dalai Lama declared the termination of the Cho-Yon relationship. Conflict to the assault succeeded when the Manchu Emperor collapsed and Tibetans forced the occupying army to surrender in 1912. The Thirteenth Dalai Lama issued a proclamation reaffirming the independence of Tibet on 14 February 1913.¹²

1912-1951 *de facto* independence of Tibet

There can be little argument that on the eve of China's military attack, which started at the close of 1949, Tibet had all the attributes of independent statehood recognized under international law: a defined territory, a population inhabiting that territory, a government, and the ability to enter into international relations. However, before this attempts were made by the Tibetan rulers to resist Chinese interference by appealing to the British.

The British government made many attempts to restore Tibetan sovereignty through its memorandum and emissaries between 1912 to 1951. For instance a memorandum in this regard was sent on August 17, 1912 which rejected Chinese sovereignty and interference over Tibet and accepted suzerainty. It also objected to Chinese interference in Tibet over the past three years and stated that until Chinese accepted Britain's demands it would not accept the new Chinese republic and forbid the entry of Chinese into Tibet via India. In 1912 the thirteenth Dalai Lama returned to Tibet and a Chinese give up was negotiated. Surrender conformity was signed on 12 August 1912 stipulating that the Chinese would lay down their arms and troops and officials would return to China within 15 days and an additional accord on 14 December, 1912, between the Chinese and Tibetan Governments approved the Chinese withdrawal from Lhasa.¹³

Fighting between Tibet and China went on in 1913, with the Tibetans successfully resisting Chinese attempts to advance into Tibet, and finally in May 1913 Britain issued invitations to a tri-partite conference designed to settle the status of Tibet between China, Great Britain and Tibet. The action of the Chinese plenipotentiary was at once repudiated by his Government and all attempts to obtain Chinese adherence to the Convention were unsuccessful. Then on July 3, 1914, the plenipotentiaries of Great Britain and Tibet signed the convention and issued the following declaration: "we the plenipotentiaries of Great Britain and Tibet, hereby record the following declaration to the effect that we acknowledge the annexed convention as initialed to be binding on the Government of Great Britain and Tibet, and we agree that so long as the Government of China withholds signature to the aforesaid convention she will be debarred from the enjoyment of all privileges accruing there from. "In token whereof we have signed and sealed this declaration, two copies in England and two in Tibetan. "Done at Simla this 3rd day of July, 1914, corresponding with the Tibetan date the 10th day of the 5th month of the Wood-Tiger year. Though, Great Britain and Tibet were thus originally prepared to agree that Tibet was part of Chinese territory, but autonomous under Chinese suzerainty. The Chinese refusal to sign, the Convention meant quite simply that the Great Britain and Tibet agreed to withhold the recognition of suzerainty and with it the understanding that Tibet was part of Chinese territory.¹⁴

The Qing Dynasty had fallen and Manchu officials were replaced. The Tibetans soon gained the upper hand against the disorganized imperial troops. After a series of successful military activities they insisted that all Imperial troops give up their arms and armaments and return to China. With all foreign troops out of Central Tibet and Tibetan forces regaining control over most of Eastern Tibet, the Dalai Lama returned to Lhasa to a grand reception. On 13 February 1913, the Dalai Lama issued a proclamation from the Potala Place reaffirming Tibet's independence, which he ordered to be posted and proclaimed in every district of Tibet, and a copy kept in the records of the offices in every district. Regarding Tibet's relations with Mongols, the Chinese, and the Manchus, the declaration by the Dalai Lama clarified that during the time of Genghis Khan and Altan Khan of the Mongols, the Ming Dynasty of the Chinese, and the Ching Dynasty of the Manchus, Tibet and China cooperated on the basis of the benefactor and priest relationship.¹⁵

While China went through revolutionary changes between 1939 to 1949 and India also passed through great changes during the same period, Tibet remained static and non-changing, living in splendid isolation and illusory independence between 1912 to 1950. This isolationism and conservatism had incalculable consequences on the fate of modern Tibet, in particular Sino-Tibetan relations. The Confucian ideocracy was transformed into a Han-dominated nation-state which tolerated no separate entities or identities like Tibet. The fluid frontiers of civilizational realms began to freeze and nibbling Tibetan territories which led to the famous Communist takeover in 1950. The symbolic tribute relations, based on recognition of virtue and imperial acclamation through Confucian rituals and ceremonies, suddenly changed into a Chinese unilateral declaration of sovereignty over Tibet.¹⁶

Tibetans under the people's Republic of China

Even before the communist came to power in China its armed forces had intruded into large areas of eastern Tibet. Extensive fighting was in progress with Tibetan resistance groups all along the border areas of Kham and Amdo, The Chinese, who had no knowledge of the topography, suffered heavy losses. When the communist came to power they sent heavy reinforcements, along with better arms and supplies, as the "Liberation" of the Tibet was high on their priority list. In 1953, as far as the Government of India (GOI) was concerned, the Tibetans, by signing the 17-point Agreement, had surrendered their right to conduct external relations and, the Indian Mission in Lhasa was informed by the Chinese that they would have to deal only with the newly established branch of the Chinese Foreign Office in Tibet.¹⁷

On 31 December 1953 negotiation began in Beijing between India and China which led to the signing of the Agreement on Trade and other dealings in the Tibet region of China. The preamble proclaimed the famous "Five Principles of Co-existence" (Panchsheel), The major clauses of this agreement were following, (i) Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; (ii) mutual non-aggression; (iii) mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs; (iv) equality and mutual benefit; (v) peaceful coexistence".¹⁸

Conclusion

The history of Tibet from 1950 to the present was heralded by the invasion of Tibet by the People's Liberation Army in 1950-51. Before this, Central Tibet had declared independence

from the Qing Dynasty in 1913, after which the Dalai Lama continued to act both as the religious and political head of Tibet. (Singh, 2009) Huge Richardson was also explained in his book “Red Star over Tibet”, that when the Manchu Dynasty collapsed in 1911, Tibet completely severed its link with outside world until the Communist invasion in 1950. There was no Chinese Government in Tibet and it enjoyed full *de facto* independence from Chinese control.

After a long civil war and the World War II, Chinese people finally established the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949. All foreign powers were driven out of China. PRC continued its move of recovering the rest of Mainland China and its army entered Tibet in 1951. Tibet had foreign relations also until it surrendered her independence by signing in 1951 the 17-point Agreement. Chinese sources generally claim progress towards a prosperous and free society in Tibet, with its pillars being economic development, and peasant emancipation. These claims, however, have been disputed by independent human rights organizations, the Tibet Government-in-Exile and some indigenous Tibetans, who charge the Chinese government with cultural genocide in Tibet.

Under immense Chinese pressures the Tibetan delegation signed the “Agreement of the Central People’s Government and the Local Government of Tibet on “Measure for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet” on 23 May 1951, without being able to inform the Tibetan Government. The seventeen clauses of the agreement among other things authorized the entry into Tibet of Chinese forces and empowered the Chinese. However, it guaranteed that China would not alter the existing political system in Tibet and not interfere with the established status, function, and powers of the Dalai Lama. The Tibetan people were to have regional autonomy, and their religious beliefs and customs were to be respected.

In assessing the Seventeen- Point Agreement on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet and the occupation of Tibet, two factors are crucial. First, the extent to which China was violating international law when the PLA marched into Tibet and second, the effect of signing of the agreement. The committee found that these and other undertakings had been violated by the Chinese People’s Republic, and that the government of Tibet was entitled to repudiate the agreement as it did on March 11, 1959.

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