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TIBET

THE FACTS

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Functioning State

Tibet was a fully functioning and independent state before the Chinese invasion. It threatened none of its neighbors, fed its population, unfailingly, year after year, with no help from the outside world, and owed nothing to any country or international institution. Although insular, theocratic and not a modern democracy, Tibet maintained law and order within its borders and conscientiously observed treaties and conventions entered into with other nations. It was one of the earliest countries to enact laws to protect wildlife and the environment — recurrently cited in the “Mountain Valley Edicts” issued since 1642,¹ and possibly earlier.²

Tibet abolished capital punishment in circa 1896, and was one of the first nations in the world to do so. The Russian explorer, G.Ts. Tsybikoff, who visited Lhasa in 1900 wrote that “The Dalai Lama assumed the head rule of Tibet, and one of his conspicuous acts is the abolition of capital punishment.”³ This fact has been consistently noted by subsequent travelers to Tibet.⁴ There is no record of Tibetans persecuting minorities (e.g. Muslims⁵) or massacring its own citizens as the Chinese government did at Tiananmen Square in 1989. Although Tibet’s frontiers with India, Nepal and Bhutan were completely unguarded and Tibetans were “great travelers”⁶ very few Tibetans fled their country as economic or political refugees. There was not a single Tibetan immigrant in the USA or Europe before the Communist invasion.⁷

Foreign Military Invasion Not “Peaceful Liberation”

On the dawn of 5th October 1950, the 52nd, 53rd & 54th divisions of the 18th Army⁸ of the “People’s Liberation” Army (as many as 40,000 troops) attacked all along the 1933 cease-fire line (*mentsam-shagsa*) on the Drichu River guarded by 3,500 Tibetan army regulars and 2,000 Khampa militiamen.

Earlier, in late 1949, Communist forces had entered areas of Eastern (Kham) and North-Eastern Tibet (Amdo) then under the military occupation of Nationalist (Guomindang) supported war-lord regimes. Recent research by a Chinese scholar reveals that Mao Zedong met Stalin on 22nd January 1950 and asked for the Soviet air force to transport supplies for the invasion of Tibet. Stalin replied: “It’s good you are preparing to attack Tibet. The Tibetans need to be subdued.”⁹



Tibetan soldiers with national flags.

An English radio operator Robert Ford (in Tibetan government service) at the Chamdo front wrote that Tibetan forward defenses at Kamthok-druga, the main ferry point on the Drichu River fought almost to the last man.¹⁰ In the south, at the Druba-rong river-crossing near Markham, the frontline troops fought heroically but were wiped out, according to an English missionary eyewitness.¹¹ Surviving units conducted fighting



Tibetan officials outside UN headquarters, New York to present Tibet's case to the General Assembly. (photo: LIFE)

retreats westwards. Four days into the retreat, one regiment was overwhelmed and destroyed. Two weeks after the initial attack, the Tibetan army finally surrendered. The biography of a Communist official noted "Many Tibetans were killed and wounded in the Chamdo campaign." and "... the Tibetan soldiers fought bravely, but they were no match for the superior numbers and better training"¹² of the Chinese forces. According to the only Western military expert who wrote on the Chinese invasion of Tibet "...the Reds suffered at least 10,000 casualties."¹³

One regiment of the Red army attacked from Xinjiang. A Chinese soldier mentions in his biography that this force was held back, to a near standstill, by the nomadic militia of Gertse in Ngari (Western Tibet).¹⁴

In 1956 the Great Khampa Uprising took place (sporadic uprisings had already broken out in Amdo) and spread throughout the country culminating in the National Uprising of March 1959. Guerrilla operations (supported by the CIA) only ceased in 1974. The popular uprisings throughout Tibet from 1987 to 1990 and most recently in 2008

— followed by draconian Chinese reprisals — clearly demonstrate that the struggle continues today.

Genocide & Cultural Genocide

Hundreds of thousands of Tibetans were killed in the fighting since 1956. Many more died in the violent political campaigns that followed, as well as in slave labor camps (*laogai*) and Mao's Great Famine. Exact statistics are unavailable. The Tibetan government has put forward an approximate figure of 1.2 million deaths, based on interviews with survivors. This has been questioned by some but without any supporting counter-evidence or statistics from official Chinese records, which exist but are not accessible. The International Commission of Jurists concluded that there was a *prima facie* case that China had committed acts of genocide in Tibet.¹⁵

The deliberate and systematic destruction of tens of thousands of monasteries, temples and historic buildings, unprecedented

in world history, as well as the wholesale destruction of thousands of metric tons of priceless works of art and worship has received some attention internationally because of photographs and documentation. The ongoing state-organized theft and marketing of looted and surviving Tibetan *objet d'art* is little known, except to art dealers and collectors.

National Flag

The modern Tibetan national flag was adopted in 1916.¹⁶ It made its international debut in an official British Crown publication in 1930,¹⁷ and in 1934 appeared in the *National Geographic Magazine's* "Flags of the World" issue.¹⁸ The Tibetan flag was also depicted in a German publication, *The Flags of All Nations of the World*, in 1937¹⁹ and even featured in a cigarette-card series in Europe in 1933.²⁰ According to an eminent vexillologist, Professor Pierre Lux-Worm, the national flag of Tibet was based on an older 7th century snow lion standard of the Tibetan Emperor, Songtsen Gampo.²¹

It should be borne in mind that over 90% of the flags of the nations in the UN were created after WWII, including the national flag of China. The Tibetan flag made its *official*

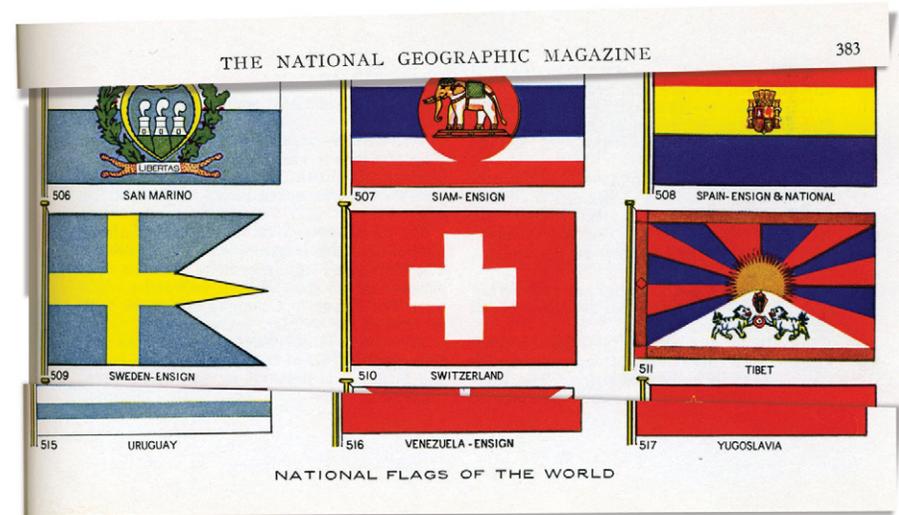
international appearance in 1947, at the First Inter-Asian Conference, which Mahatma Gandhi addressed. The Tibetan flag was displayed alongside other flags of Asian nations, and a circular flag emblem placed before the Tibetan delegation on the podium.²²

National Anthem

The old Tibetan national anthem or national "hymn"²³ *Gangri Rawae* ("Snow Mountain Wall") was composed in 1745 by the (secular) Tibetan ruler, Pholanas.²⁴

*Circled by a wall of snow-mountains -
This sacred realm,
This source of all benefits and happiness.
Kalsang Gyatso, Buddha of compassion
May he reign till the end of all existence*

It was recited at the end of official ceremonies and sung at the beginning of opera performances in Lhasa.²⁵ When the Tibetan government came into exile in India, a new national anthem, *Sishe Pende* ("Universal Peace and Benefits") was adopted.²⁶ The lyrics were composed by the Dalai Lama's tutor, Trichang Rimpoche, who was considered a great poet in the classical *nyen-ngak* (Skt. *kavya*) tradition.



National Geographic Magazine's "Flags of the World" (1934).



Detail from a "Map of the World" in Mathew Carey's General Atlas (1811).

Asia drawn by Anthony Finley of Philadelphia, clearly shows "Great Thibet" as distinct from the Chinese Empire.³¹

The largest stained glass globe in the world (in Boston), based on the Rand McNally 1934 map of the world, shows Tibet as a separate nation.³²

Some old maps of China published in the West put Tibet within China's borders. But these maps are invariably titled "Empire of China" or "Chinese Empire", and often include Mongolia, Bhutan, Nepal, and sometimes even Korea, Burma or Vietnam within China's frontiers. Early Chinese maps do not feature Tibet as a part of China. In a landmark map of China drawn in 1594 by Wang Fen, a senior Ming Legal Officer, there is a note stating that the map included the whole of China's territory. But no Tibetan areas, not even the eastern-most regions of Amdo or Kham, appear on the map.³³

Following the publication of the atlas commissioned by the Manchu Emperor Kangxi and created by French Jesuit cartographers, some Chinese and European maps began to depict Tibet as a colony or protec-

torate of China. The Jesuits could not personally survey Tibet (as they had surveyed China and Manchuria) since Tibet was not part of the Chinese Empire. So they trained two Mongol monks³⁴ in Beijing and sent them to make a secret survey of Tibet. Similar clandestine surveys of Tibet were conducted by British mapmakers using trained Himalayan natives and even a Mongol monk. An American sinologist, writing on such issues, noted that, like European colonial powers, China used cartography to further its "Colonial Enterprise" in Tibet and Korea.³⁵

Tibetan Currency

Literary sources³⁶ refer to gold, silver and copper ingot-coins, even cowrie shells, being used as currency in ancient Tibet. From circa 1650 silver coins for Tibet were struck in Nepal (the *Bhal-tang*) under a treaty agreement.³⁷ In 1792 following the defeat of Nepal by a joint Tibetan-Manchu force, coins bearing both Tibetan and Chinese inscriptions were circulated. But the Tibetan government continued to issue its own coins with only

Maps of Tibet

Most pre-1950 maps, globes and atlases, including the earliest maps on record of Asia, depict Tibet as an independent nation, separate from China. The oldest existing globe in the world, and possibly the first terrestrial globe ever made, was constructed by Martin Behaim (geographer to the king of Portugal) in 1492. It depicts the world before the discovery of America. Tibet is clearly identified in German as "Thebet ein konigreich", or "Tibet, a kingdom."²⁷

A map of Asia drawn by the Dutch cartographer, Pietar van der Aa, around 1680 shows Tibet in two parts but distinct from China,²⁸ as does a 1700 map drawn by the French cartographer Guillaume de L'Isle, where Tibet is referred to as the "Kingdom of Grand Tibet."²⁹ A map of India, China and Tibet published in the USA in 1877 represents Tibet as distinct from the two other nations.³⁰ An 1827 map of



ABOVE | Martin Behaim's globe at Nuremberg.
TOP | Detail from a 1831 map of Asia by S.G. Goodrich.



Kongpar tangka, Gaden tangka, Kalsang tangka and three Srang coin.

Tibetan legends as the Kongpar tangka (1791-93) and the Gaden tangka (1836-1911). A silver coin, Kalsang tangka was struck in 1909.



One hundred srang note (1942) with handwritten serial number.

After the expulsion of the Chinese army in 1912, Tibet minted its own coin gold, silver and copper coin in Lhasa, using Buddhist and Tibetan designs and bearing the name of the Tibetan government. Paper currency was introduced into Tibet in the early 20th century, and according to the numismatist Wolfgang Bertsch, these bank notes were “small works of art.”³⁸ A unique aspect of Tibetan banknotes were the serial numbers which were handwritten by a guild of specialist calligraphists, the *epa*, to prevent forgery.

Even after the Communist invasion Tibetans successfully resisted Chinese efforts to take over their currency. Official Chinese

currency only came into use after the flight of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government from Tibet in March 1959.³⁹ Official Chinese currency had never been used in Tibet, in its entire history, before 1959.

Tibetan Passports

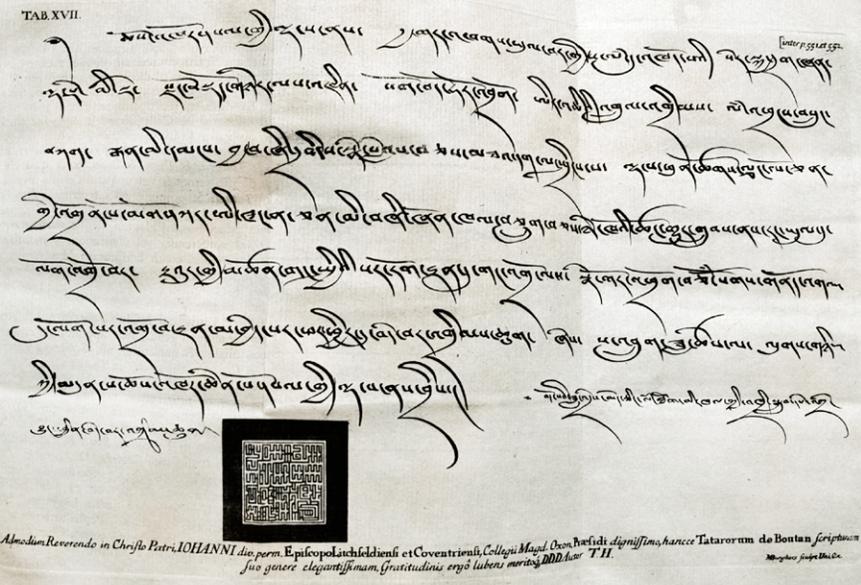
The Tibetan government issued its own passports to travelers entering its borders or (the few) Tibetans who traveled abroad. Before WWI, the term “passport” covered visas and travel documents in general. The earliest record of a Tibetan passport issued to a foreign traveler is in 1688 to an Armenian merchant, Hovannes (Johannes).⁴⁰ In 1780 a passport was issued from Lhasa to Purangir Gossain,⁴¹ an emissary of the Governor-General of India, Warren Hastings, who hoped to open up Tibet to trade with the East India Company.

The Tibetan government gave its approval for the first-ever Everest expedition in 1921. Charles Bell, the visiting British diplomat in Lhasa wrote “I received from the Tibetan Government a passport in official form, which granted permission for the climbing of Mount Everest.”⁴² The subsequent Everest expeditions of 1924 and 1936 also received passports from the Tibetan government.⁴³ Passports were sometimes issued for scientific undertakings: the Schaeffer anthropological expedition of 1939,⁴⁴ Tucci’s ethnological expedition of 1949,⁴⁵ and the botanical expeditions of Frank Kingdon Ward in 1924.⁴⁶

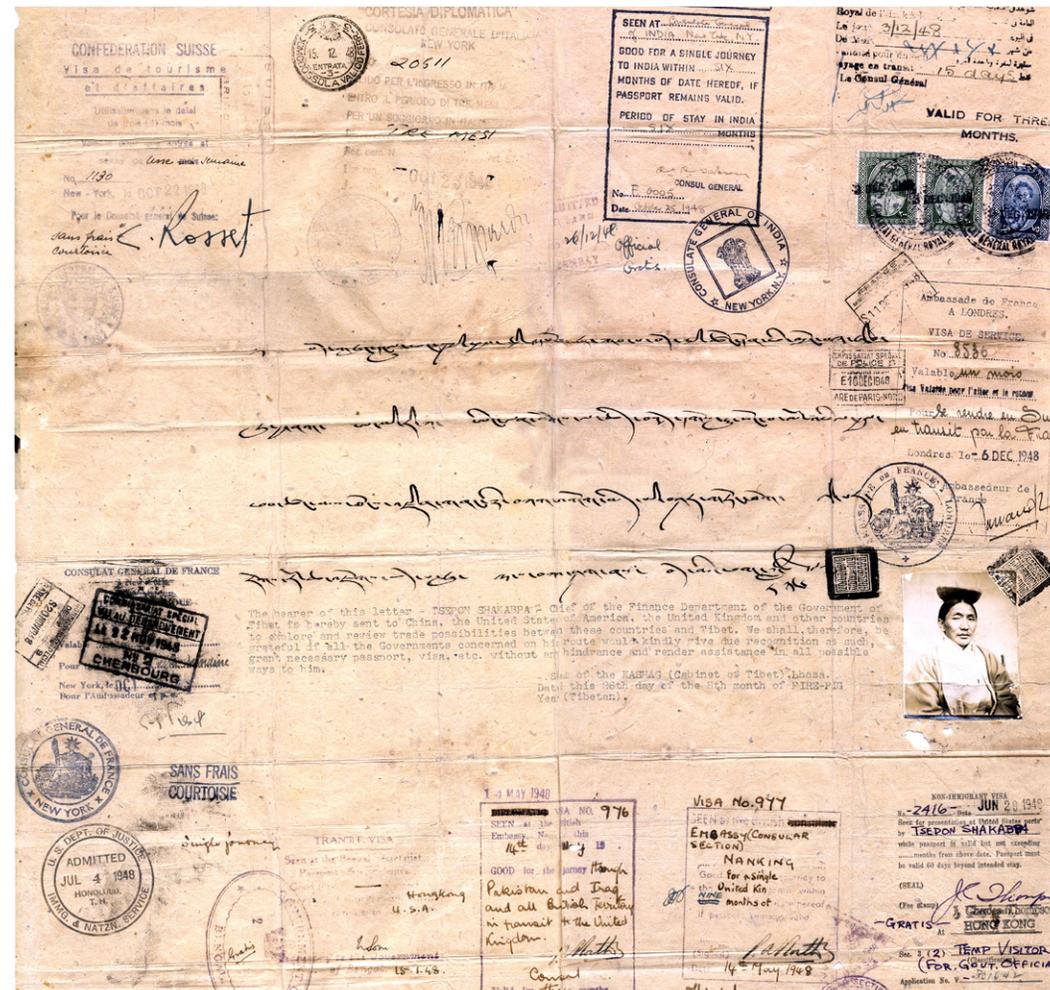
President Roosevelt’s two envoys to Tibet in 1942 were presented their passports at Yatsung.⁴⁷ Lowell Thomas Jr. and Sr. visited Tibet in 1949, and were issued “Tibetan passports” at Dhomo. Thomas Jr. wrote “When the Dalai Lama’s passport was spread out before us, I could not help thinking that many Western explorers who had failed to reach Lhasa would have highly prized a document like this.”⁴⁸

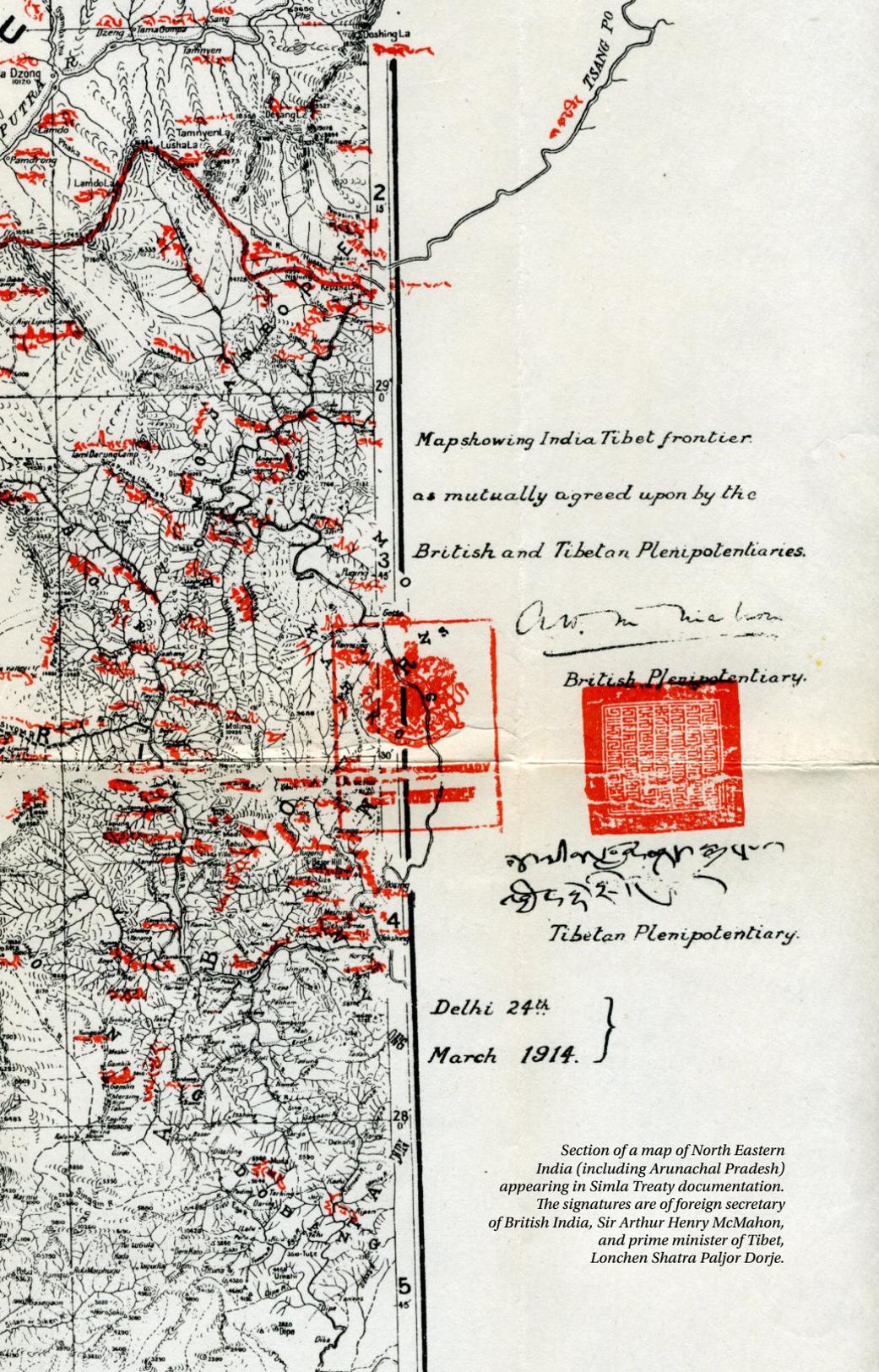
Since 1912 passports were also issued to Tibetans leaving for foreign countries.⁴⁹ The

TOP-RIGHT | Hand engraved copy of Tibetan passport of 1688.
 BOTTOM-RIGHT | The first modern Tibetan passport (1948) issued to finance secretary, Tsepon Wangchuk Deden Shakabpa.



Almodun Reverendo in Christo Patri JOHANNI. de perm. Episcopali cheldiendi et Coventroni, Collegii Magd. Oxon. Pontifici dignissimo, hancce Tatarorum de Bontan scripturam suo genere elegantissimam, fructuosissimam ergo labens merito DDD. dicit T.H.





first modern Tibetan passport with personal information, photograph and space for visas and endorsements was issued in 1948 to members of the Tibetan trade mission.⁵⁰ It was modeled on the international one-page fold-out model of 1915. Britain, the USA and seven other countries issued visas and transit visas for this document.

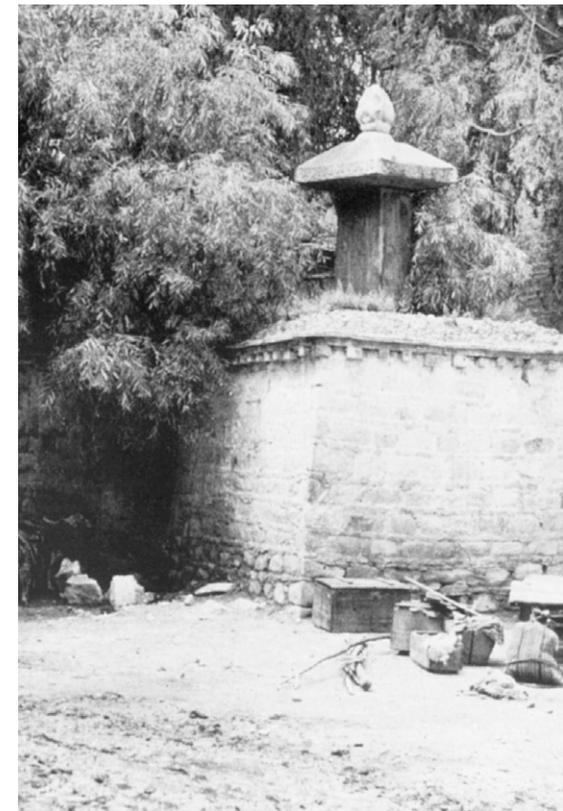
Treaties

One of the most important treaties between the Tibetan Empire and the Chinese Empire (concluded after a decisive Tibetan military victory) dates back to AD 821-822. The text, in Tibetan and Chinese was engraved on three stone pillars (*doring*). The only surviving pillar is near the Jokhang temple in Lhasa.⁵¹ One clause in the treaty regarding the frontier (near the present Gansu-Shaanxi border) clearly states: "All to the East is the country of Great China; and all to the West is, without question, the country of Great Tibet."⁵²

This treaty pillar is sometimes mistaken for the more eye-catching Shol *doring* before the Potala on which is inscribed the record of another great Tibetan victory, the capture of the Tang Imperial capital of Changan in 763 AD.

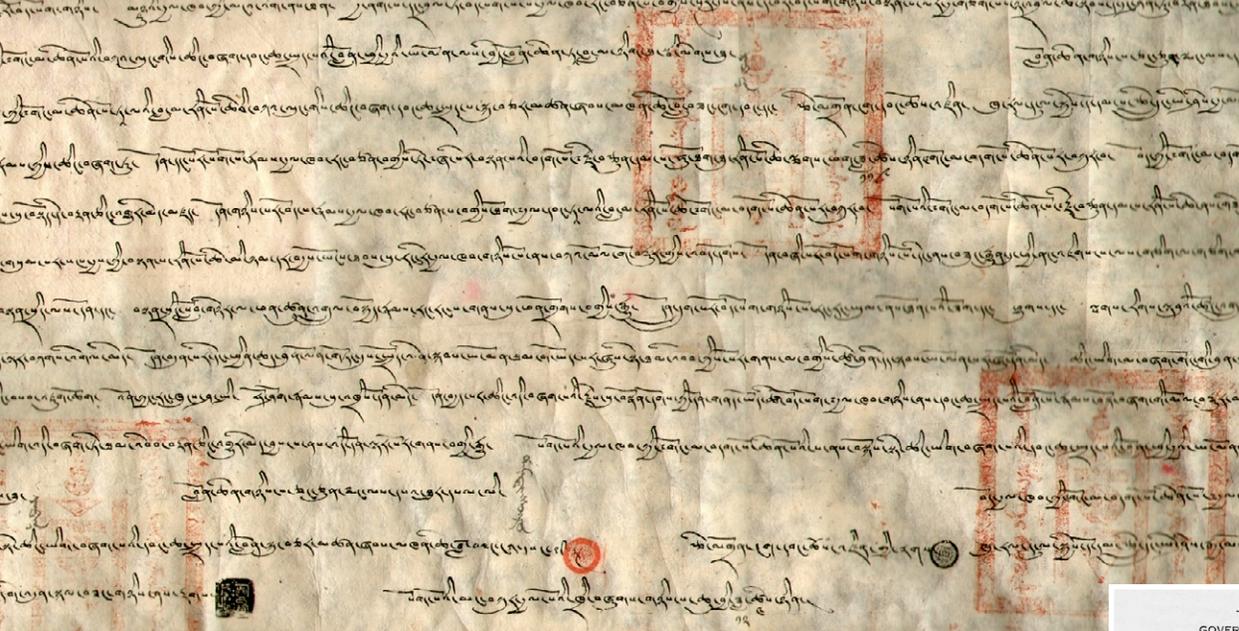
As an independent nation, Tibet entered into treaties with neighboring states: Bushair 1681, Ladakh 1683 and 1842, Nepal 1856,⁵³ and so on.

In January 1913, Tibet and Mongolia signed a treaty in Urga, the preamble of which reads: "Whereas Mongolia and Tibet having freed themselves from the Manchu dynasty and separated themselves from China, have become independent states, and whereas the two States have always professed one and the same religion, and to the end that their ancient mutual friendships may be strengthened..."⁵⁴ Declarations of friendship, mutual aid, Buddhist fraternity, and mutual trade follow in the various articles. The Tibetan word *rangzen* is used throughout to mean "independence".



Treaty Pillar of 821-22 AD

Tibet signed a number of treaties and conventions with Britain culminating in the Simla Treaty of 1914 by which British India and Tibet reached an agreement on their common frontier.⁵⁵ India's present-day claims to the demarcation of its northern border (the McMahon Line) is based on this treaty which was signed by independent Tibet — not China.



ABOVE | Mongolia-Tibet Treaty of 1913.

Declaration of Independence

A formal declaration of independence was promulgated by the 13th Dalai Lama on the 8th day of the 1st month of the Water-Ox year (1913).⁵⁶ On the 10th of October 1913 the Prime Minister of Tibet, Lonchen Shatra, in his position paper at the Simla Conference, made a detailed statement of Tibetan independence. Shatra included the provinces of Kham and Amdo in this declaration, even specifying the precise traditional frontiers of these provinces with China.⁵⁷ On September 1918, the Moscow daily *Izvesta* carried an article on Tibet describing Tibet's declaration of independence "...as the banner of uprising for self-determination."⁵⁸

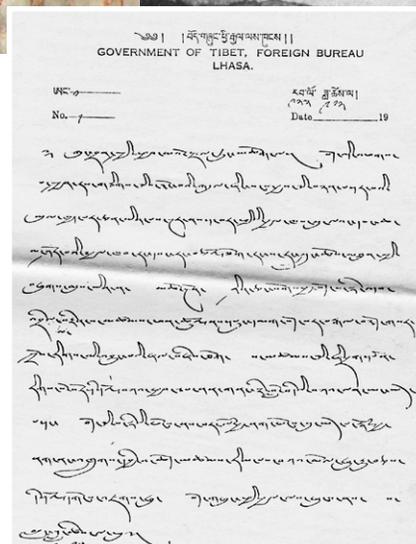
Earlier in 1909 when the Dalai Lama returned to Lhasa from Beijing the Tibetan parliament in a rejection of Chinese rule and symbolic declaration of independence, presented him with a new seal from the Tibetan people.⁵⁹ A new silver coin (the Kal-sang tangka, mentioned earlier) was struck that same year and distributed to the monks of the three seats to mark this auspicious oc-

casation. A Bureau of Foreign Affairs was also established that year to underscore Tibet's sovereign status.⁶⁰

Foreign Relations

This Foreign Bureau was reconstituted in 1941.⁶¹ It conducted diplomatic relations with Britain, USA, Nepal, independent India and China. Nepal set up its legation in Lhasa in 1856, China in 1934 and Britain in 1936. Foreign ministry officials represented Tibet as an independent nation⁶² in the Inter-Asian Relations Conference convened in India March 23, 1947 to assess the status of Asia in the period following WWII. Tibet was also represented at the Afro-Asian Conference in 1948. Many participating nations were yet to be decolonized making Tibet one of the few established independent nations in that early pan-Asian gathering.

A letter from the Foreign Bureau dated 2nd Nov 1949, to "Mr. Mautsetung", describes Tibet as a religious nation, independent from "earliest times", and requests the Communist leader to "issue strict orders" to his officers



not to cross into Tibetan territory. The letter also states that on the question of Tibetan territory that had been illegally annexed by China earlier "...the Tibetan government would like to open negotiations after the settlement of the Chinese Civil War."⁶³



ABOVE | First Inter-Asian Conference, Delhi 1947. Tibetan delegates seated behind Tibet flag emblem.

LEFT | Foreign Bureau letter to Mao Zedong.

BELOW | Great Seal of the Dalai Lama presented to him by the Tibetan National Assembly in 1909.





ABOVE | Presidents Roosevelt's envoys
RIGHT | Presidents Roosevelt's gifts to the Dalai Lama



Neutrality in World War II

Tibet was a declared neutral country (*bhar-nas gyalkhap*) during WWII. The Tibetan government successfully resisted pressure from Britain, a threat of invasion from China, and even the personal request of President Roosevelt⁶⁴ to allow construction of a military road through Tibetan territory, or allow the passage of military supplies. In a humanitarian gesture, passage of non-military goods was later permitted. Tibet granted political asylum to two Austrians⁶⁵ who escaped from a British POW camp in India. It also provided hospitality and transport to American flyers whose plane crashed in Tibet in 1944.⁶⁶

Post & Telegraph System

The modern Tibetan postal service was built on courier systems used during the early Tibetan Empire and Mongol Imperial rule. A "pony express" (*atrung*) service was used for official missives, while general mail

was carried by a system of postal-runners (*bhangchen* or *dak-pa*). A Central Post and Telegraph Office (*dak-tar laykhung*) was created in 1920 in Lhasa,⁶⁷ which took over the old postal stations (*tasam*) throughout Tibet. Postage stamps of various denominations were indigenously designed and hand-printed, and are now collector's items. Though not a signatory to the International Postal Treaty, a system was created so that letters from Tibet could be delivered to foreign addresses,⁶⁸ and letters from abroad be delivered inside Tibet.

Spencer Chapman, visiting Lhasa in 1936, declared that, "the postal and telegraph sys-

tem is most efficient."⁶⁹ The same system continued for some years after 1950. The Czech filmmaker Vladimir Cis (working for the Chinese Communist government) had a letter from his family in Prague delivered to him in the wilderness of Tibet by a postal-runner.⁷⁰

A telegraph line from India to Lhasa was completed in 1923, along with a basic telephone service. Both were open for public use. The event was commemorated in a publication of the Royal Geographical Society, London.⁷¹ The Tibetan capital was electrified in 1927. The work of installing both the hydroelectric plant and the distribution system was undertaken near "single-handedly" by a young (London-trained) Tibetan engineer, Ringang.⁷² All these projects were initiated and paid for by the Tibetan government.

Radio Lhasa was launched in 1948 and broadcasted news in Tibetan, English and Chinese.⁷³

Witnesses to Independent Tibet

The fact that Tibet was a peaceful, independent country is attested to by the writings of many impartial western observers who not only visited pre-invasion Tibet, but even lived there for considerable periods of time — as the titles of some of their memoirs seem

to proudly proclaim: *Twenty Years in Tibet* by David McDonald, *Seven Years in Tibet* by Heinrich Harrer, and even *Eight Years in Tibet*, the biography of Peter Aufschnaiter.

The premier scholar on Tibet, Hugh Richardson, lived for nine years in Tibet, and his many writings reveal a country that was functioning, orderly, peaceful and with a long history of political independence and cultural achievement. He later wrote, "The British government, the only government among Western countries to have had treaty relations with Tibet, sold the Tibetans down the river..." Richardson also acknowledged that he was "profoundly ashamed"⁷⁴ at the British government's refusal to recognize Tibet's historically independent status.

Another great scholar and diplomat, Charles Bell, regarded as the "architect of Britain's Tibet policy," was convinced that Britain and America's refusal to recognize Tibetan independence (but which they sometimes tacitly acknowledged when it was to their advantage) was largely dictated by their desire "to increase their commercial profits in China."⁷⁵

It is almost certain that *none* of the Chinese propagandists who demonize Tibet in official Communist publications have ever witnessed life in old Tibet. In fact, *none* of Beijing's Tibet propagandists in the West had visited Tibet before 1980. A typical way these people misrepresent old Tibet is through selective quotes from the writings of correspondents and officials who accompanied the British invasion force of 1904, and who

attempted to justify that violent imperialist venture into Tibet by demonizing Tibetan society and government.

The only high-ranking Chinese official with scholarly credentials who spent any length of time in old Tibet was Dr. Shen Tsung-lien, representative of the Republic of China in Lhasa from 1944 to

Tibetan postage stamps on envelope with New Jersey address.



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1949. In his book *Tibet and the Tibetans*, Dr. Shen writes of a nation clearly distinct from China, and one that "...had enjoyed full independence since 1911." He writes truthfully of a hierarchical, conservative society "fossilized many centuries back" but whose people were orderly, peaceful and hospitable - but also "notorious litigants," adding that "few peoples in the world are such eloquent pleaders." Shen also mentions that "Appeals may be addressed to any office to which the disputants belong, or even to the Dalai Lama or his regent."⁷⁶

TOP | Hugh E. Richardson at Lhasa garden party.

LEFT | Dr. Shen with Tibetan Foreign Secretary, Surkhang Dzasa.

ABOVE | Sir Charles Bell.

Dr. Shen was probably struck by this feature of old Tibetan society, where people had access to some kind of customary legal recourse even in disputes with authority - as it was then largely absent in a China of warlords and generalissimos. It is unhappily absent even now in modern Communist China.

24. The eminent Tibetan scholar, Tashi Tsering citing the historical work *Bka' blon rtogs brjod*, says that this verse was composed by the Tibetan ruler, Phola lha nas, (in 1745/46) in praise of the 7th Dalai Lama. "Reflections on Thang stong rgyal po as the founder of the a lce lha mo tradition of Tibetan performing arts," *The Singing Mask: Echoes of Tibetan Opera, Lungta*, Winter 2001 No 15, eds. Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy and Tashi Tsering)
25. Audio clip of *namthar* (opera aria) of National Hymn sung by Techung accompanied by Nima Gyalpo. Courtesy of Chaksampa Opera Company, San Francisco.
26. *The Collected Works of the Glorious Master of the Dharma, Yongzin Trichang Vajradhara (yongjog tempae ngadak kyapche yongzin trichang dorjee chang chempoe sungbum)*, published by Mongolian Lama Guru Deva, New Delhi, Vol Gha, pg 299. Mentions that the national anthem was composed in 1959 by Trichang Rinpoche at Mussoorie, U.P.
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