

15

# THE WESTERN REGIONS (HSI-YÜ) UNDER THE T'ANG EMPIRE AND THE KINGDOM OF TIBET\*

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## Contents

Three great empires . . . . .	348
The Western Regions under the Early T'ang . . . . .	349
The kingdom of Tibet . . . . .	358

## Three great empires

The seventh century is of particular significance for the political history of Central Asia. In its first quarter it witnessed the rise of three great powers, each of which was to have a major impact on the course of events in the two succeeding centuries. In the east, China came under one of its most powerful and prosperous dynasties, the T'ang (618–907). At the foot of the towering peaks of the Himalayas, the ancient Tibetan people, the Bod (known as the Tu-po or more commonly as the Tu-fan in Chinese records, and as Tüpüt in Sogdian and Turkic), emerged victorious from their age-old inter-tribal rivalry and were quick to establish a unified monarchy of the Yar-klung-spurgyal family. In the west a series of historical events led to the sudden rise of the Arabs.

By a curious coincidence, all three empires were founded almost simultaneously. In the 640s the T'ang came to dominate the oasis states of the Tarim. From the 660s onwards, Tibet, having established itself firmly in the Koko Nor area (now Qinghai province in

\* See [Map 6](#).

China), began to dispute supremacy over the Gansu corridor and the Tarim with the T'ang. This rivalry, which lasted more than two centuries, brought several other peoples in this area into the conflict. Thus, a multilateral relationship between the T'ang, the Tibetans and many Türk confederations evolved in the Western Regions (Hsi-yü), which reflected a motley combination of interests. At the same time, the Arabs accomplished their conquest of the Sasanian Empire in 651 and continued to push eastwards.

One hundred years later, in 751, the Arabs under the command of Ziyad b. Salih, in alliance with the Karluks and other Turkic peoples, defeated the Chinese forces under the military governor Kao Hsien-chih near the Talas river. In itself this battle was not of great importance, but the outbreak of the An Lushan rebellion (755–763) in China proper, and the consequent withdrawal of the Chinese armies from the Western Regions, left the Arabs in a strong position to extend their influence in Central Asia. However, according to the evidence of both Chinese and Tibetan sources, any further Arab advance seems to have been temporarily checked by the Tibetans.<sup>1</sup>

## The Western Regions under the Early T'ang

Before the establishment of the T'ang dynasty in 618, the Eastern and Western Türks dominated the vast expanse of the Central Asian hinterland. The Eastern Türk *kaghan* Hsieh-li (619–634) made repeated incursions into China and even reached the vicinity of Ch'ang-an, the T'ang capital, in 626; but the tide of events then began to turn in favour of the T'ang. In 630 Hsieh-li was taken prisoner by the T'ang expeditionary forces, thus ending the power of the Eastern Türk *Kaghanate* for over half a century. In the same year, the Western Türk *kaghan*, T'ung *yabghu* (619–630), was murdered. His death triggered off a series of quarrels and bitter rivalries among the Western Türks. Most of the nomadic tribes on the steppe, together with the oasis city-states of the Tarim basin, were caught in the conflict between the T'ang and the Western Türks, changing their allegiance as the situation required.

It is no accident that the first oasis city-state that the emperor T'ai-tsung (627–649), the real founder of the T'ang dynasty, intended to conquer was Kocho: located in the Turfan depression, a strategic location on the Silk Route, this oasis was the closest to Ch'ang-an as well as the largest of the Western Regions. Ever since the first century B.C., it had been more influenced by Chinese culture than other oasis states. From 502 to 640, it was even ruled by the royal House of Ch'ü, of Chinese origin. In 638 the king of Kocho, an ally of the Western Türks, was encouraged by them to defy the T'ang. The emperor

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<sup>1</sup> Beckwith, 1980, pp. 30–8; 1987; Bacot et al., 1940–46; Chang, 1959–60.

T'ai-tsung dispatched an expeditionary army against the king. The Western Türks, whose troops were stationed at Beshbalyk (present-day Jimsa in Xinjiang), an important city to the north of Turfan, had promised to assist Kocho in case of attack, but fled upon the arrival of the Chinese. In 640 Kocho was forced to surrender. The occupation of Kocho not only inaugurated the Chinese penetration of the Western Regions, but also increased tension between the Chinese and the Western Türks. The T'ang set up Hsi-chou Prefecture in Kocho and T'ing-chou Prefecture in Beshbalyk in 640.

T'ang policy after the conquest of Kocho was aimed at dominating all the Western Regions. In spite of opposition by the Western Türks, the king of Karashahr acknowledged T'ang rule in 644. Two years later, Haripuspa, who had succeeded Suvarnadeva (624–646) as ruler of Kucha, submitted to the Western Türk *Kaghanate*. In response, the T'ang army crossed the T'ien Shan and captured the city. Most of the other oasis states hastened to offer their submission. On the death of Emperor T'ai-tsung in 649, Ho-lu, *kaghan* of the Western Türks, sought to reassert his supremacy over the Western Regions. After a campaign lasting seven years (651–657), the T'ang defeated Ho-lu and the Western Türks ceased to exist as a political force.

## ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

To rule the newly conquered areas, the T'ang created a double administrative system, which took account of local conditions. Three oases in the eastern part of the region, where Chinese influence was most evident – Hami, Turfan and Jimsa – were incorporated into the Chinese civil administration. The discovery of many administrative documents bearing official seals has provided concrete evidence of T'ang rule in the Turfan district.<sup>2</sup> Nomadic tribes and city-states that had pledged allegiance to the T'ang court were allowed to maintain their privileged status in their localities in accordance with a system called *chi-mi*. This was an institution by which the conquered rulers were 'restrained' (*chi*), and 'won over' (*mi*) by the honour of being invested with a title and the conferment of an embroidered silk robe, together with the standard, drums and horns as the emblems of mandate.

The *chi-mi* system was an important means of resolving conflicts between the T'ang court and the various nationalities under their rule. The T'ang usually appointed representative members of those ruling clans, or hereditary royal families, who had pledged allegiance to government posts and bestowed on them honourable ranks or titles. In principle, all the original rulers within the *chi-mi* governorates or prefectures were allowed to continue to reside in and oversee the domestic affairs of their districts. For example,

<sup>2</sup> 2. *Tu-lu-fan chu-tu wen-shu*, 1985–92.

the T'ang set up for the nomadic Western Türks two *chi-mi* Protectorates-General – those of Meng-chih and K'un-ling – with the subordinate Türk chieftains appointed as *khans* and protectors-general. Four *chi-mi* governorates were also established for the sedentary inhabitants of the oasis states.

The officials in charge of the various *chi-mi* administrations were all members of the local minority élites. For example, King Su-chi (son of Haripuspa) and King Fu-shih-hsiung were nominated governors-general of Kucha and of Pi-sha (Visha in Khotanese, Vijaya in Tibetan) in Khotan respectively. *Chi-mi* administrators had to pledge allegiance to the T'ang, accepting the patents issued to them by their Chinese overlords. Their task was to guarantee the security of the empire's borders, while the T'ang government stationed troops only in key locations, namely the 'Four Garrisons'. All *chi-mi* administrators regularly had to pay taxes to the T'ang court. The tribute included horses, sheep, camels, eagles, the skins of leopards and martens, rare birds, jade, agate, pearls, *shui-ching* ('germ of water' crystal), gold and silver wares and various kinds of woollen blankets. Of all the items of tribute, the horses from the Western Regions were the most important.

To control the *chi-mi* governorates the T'ang set up a combined civil and military administration, the Protectorate-General of An-hsi (i.e. 'Pacifying the West'). It was first established immediately after the conquest of Kocho in 640 and moved to Kucha after the suppression of the revolt of Ho-lu in 657. The Four Garrisons – Kucha, Su-le (Kashgar), Khotan and Yen-chih (Agni in Tokharian, Karashahr in Turkic) – came under the jurisdiction of this Protectorate-General. From 679 to 719 Suyab was listed among the Four Garrisons instead of Yen-chih. It should be noted that the An-hsi Protectorate-General, with its Four Garrisons, was in control of all the region's military and administrative affairs. In 702 the Protectorate-General of Pei-t'ing was established at Beshbalyk to strengthen the T'ang position to the north of the T'ien Shan (the Celestial Mountains).

## THE TIBETAN CHALLENGE

After 659 the T'ang faced their most powerful opponent in the Tarim when the Tibetans appeared on the stage to challenge T'ang supremacy. Allying themselves with the revived Eastern Türks and various tribes of the resurgent Western Türks, the Tibetans invaded the Tarim and repeatedly occupied the oasis states. Under their attacks, after 663, the Chinese were more than once forced to withdraw and to abandon An-hsi with its Four Garrisons to the Tibetans. At the peak of its power, the territory controlled by Tibet ranged from the T'ien Shan in the north to T'ien-chu (the Chinese name for present-day India) in the south, and from the present western Gansu province and Sichuan in the east to eastern Central Asia. In 692 the T'ang finally defeated the Tibetans, restored the Protectorate-General of

An-hsi in Kucha and recovered the Four Garrisons. At this time a Chinese force of some 30,000 men was stationed in the Western Regions. The presence of a permanent garrison indicates the threat posed by the Tibetans and the T'ang court's need to keep control of the Four Garrisons and the route by which they were supplied.

### SOCIETY, RELIGION AND CULTURE

Under the Early T'ang, the Turkic tribes had a nomadic economy with the corresponding customs and way of life. Later they became semi-nomadic, transmigrating between winter quarters and seasonal pastures.

Under T'ang rule, the sedentary population in the area south of the T'ien Shan adopted new customs. In Kucha, for example, people had their hair cut short around the top of their heads – the only exception was the king, who, moreover, wore a hat and robe made of brocade, and a bejewelled belt. At the start of each year, there were games involving goats, horses and fighting camels. These festivities lasted for seven days, with predictions about the year's harvests based on the results of such fights. The 'sprinkling with cold water' was a winter solstice dance. In the tenth month of the year, participants had to wear masks, paint their faces to resemble animals or disguise themselves as ghosts, leaping about to the clamour of drums and other musical instruments. They splashed cold water on each other and over passers-by in order to drive out devils. The local population were adherents of Buddhism (see pages 364–5), especially the Hinayana school. Every year, on the occasion of certain Buddhist festivals, people would gather to hear the exposition of Buddhist doctrines; statues of the Buddha were taken from the monasteries and carried on a 'parade of Buddhas', often drawing thousands of participants.

Of all the cultural activities in Kucha, music and dance seem to have had the greatest importance and influence and to have enjoyed the greatest popularity among the people. The music and dance of Kucha were celebrated by many T'ang poets. 'Rainbow Skirt and Feathered Dress', a song and dance of Central Asian origin, was probably brought into Ch'ang-an, the T'ang capital, by way of Kucha. The best known of all was the popular music of Western Liang, a town of the Gansu corridor (now Wu-wei in Gansu province): it was actually an amalgam of the music of Kucha with traditional Chinese music. After being introduced into the two T'ang capitals, Ch'ang-an and Lo-yang, the songs and dances of the population of the Western Regions also became very popular. Even the so-called *Ta-yüeh* (Grand Music), played at the imperial court, was mixed with Kuchean music and used Kuchean musical instruments, as recorded in the *T'ang shu*. The Kuchean four-stringed bent-neck lute, the oboe, the flute and the drum were among the most popular instruments adopted by Kuchean musicians.

Under the influence of the musical styles of Kucha and that of Sogdiana, Chinese T'ang music began to sound like that of the city-states of Central Asia. Following the fashion, many members of the imperial family and of the aristocracy took to playing drums of the type widely used in musical performances in the Western Regions. During that time, almost all the famous musicians and dancers in the T'ang capital – for example, the Kuchean musician Po Ming-ta – were of Central Asian origin. As for the dancing girls, with their long hair, fluttering sleeves and gauzy scarves, they excelled in beautiful dances with whirling gyrations 'as swift as the wind'.

In the kingdom of Khotan, the people were pious and enthusiastic Buddhists and it seems likely that Khotan had already adopted Buddhism some time before the first century. Hundreds of *saṅghārāmas* (monasteries), studying the Mahayana doctrine, were active centres of religious and literary life, engaged in copying Buddhist Sanskrit and Khotanese Saka manuscripts, translating and adapting Indian poetry and religious literature, and so on. Khotan was always attractive to Chinese pilgrims seeking Buddhist scriptures.

The Khotanese paid particular attention to etiquette. Whenever they sent a letter, they would hold it over their heads to show respect for the recipient. They used wood to make pens, and jade to make seals. The people of Khotan excelled in woollen rugs and carpets and silk tapestries of fine workmanship, with figurative and floral motifs. They were also, like the people of Kucha, devoted to singing and dancing.

Many areas of Central Asia maintained their own distinctive styles and considerably influenced the development of T'ang culture. The Barbarian (*Hu*) styles constituted a prominent element in T'ang culture and art; and Barbarian and Turkic costumes became fashionable in Ch'ang-an and Lo-yang, with even the imperial family and the aristocracy adopting the fashion. Many well-known painters came from the Western Regions. Among the painters of the seventh century, a father and son from the Yü-chi family – Yü-chi Pa-chih-na and Yüch'ih I-sen (Visha Irasangä in Khotanese) – were the best known. Famous as 'Yü-chi the Elder' and 'Yü-chi the Younger, they were members of the Khotan royal family. Yü-chi the Younger specialized in painting Buddhas and foreigners; a painting of a *devaraja* by this master has survived.<sup>3</sup>

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The frequent passage of caravans along the Silk Route had not only stimulated trade, but also promoted the exchange between East and West of scientific, artistic and cultural achievements, as documented by abundant archaeological evidence. The most important

<sup>3</sup> Liu, 1969; Samolin, 1964; Tikhvinskiy and Litvinsky, 1988; Litvinsky (ed.), 1992.



FIG. 1. Kocho. Seated Buddha. Wood. Photo: © bpk, Berlin. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

material remains found in the tombs at Astana and Karakhoja (two cemeteries in the suburbs of Kocho) are Chinese documents, silk fabrics, clay sculptures, wooden figures (Fig. 1), paintings (Fig. 2), pottery and woodwork, building equipment, dried fruit and dried foods, Byzantine gold and Persian silver coins, as well as T'ang copper coins. Although most of these relics are damaged and incomplete, they are authentic products of the T'ang period. In the paintings on silk, for example, the 'plump women' are typical of the peak period of T'ang art. Many of the Confucian classics were found in the tombs around Kocho.

Archaeological evidence shows that elaborate funerals were held for the dead. The tombs of the period usually had one or more chambers, doors and paved approaches. In





FIG. 2. Kocho. Head of Buddha. Wall painting. Photo: © bpk, Berlin. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

the case of government officials and persons of importance, the funerary objects included wooden models of chambers and pavilions, clay figurines representing male and female attendants, and men and women riding horses or playing polo. The same group of graves (i.e. tombs at Astana and Karakhoja) also yielded painted clay tomb-guardians or guardian genii, and figures showing the fabulous creatures of composite monsters with both human and animal features. A T'ang copper coin, a Persian silver coin or a Byzantine gold coin was frequently placed in the mouth of the deceased and the face was covered with a special type of brocade called *fu-mien*.

From both the archaeological evidence and the literary sources, it is clear that there were workshops in the oasis states specializing in the production and manufacture of textiles,



paper, wine, pottery, wooden objects, utensils, coaches and horse trappings. There were also grain-depots, firewood merchants and jewellers' shops. In the markets, people traded in silks, cattle, horses, camels and slaves. A new wine-making grape, the famous 'mare teat' or 'horsenipple' grape, was introduced from Kocho to China, and with it, knowledge of the art of making grape wine in 'eight colours' of this highly aromatic beverage. Another novelty was cotton cloth (*tie-pu*), spun and woven by the natives of Turfan.

Silk had long been China's traditional export. Chinese documents unearthed from ancient tombs in Turfan show that Chinese silk was then available in all Central Asian markets. Under the T'ang, the silk industry made important progress and textile centres began to appear in the Western Regions. There were special brocades from Kucha, Kashgar and Kocho and Persian *dibādj*-brocade was also on sale.<sup>4</sup> A batch of T'ang silk products, discovered in tombs at Turfan, includes brocade, damask, lute-strings, silk gauze, and printed and embroidered silk fabrics. The bright colours and unique designs of this superb collection are very impressive. Advanced Chinese techniques in textileproduction, paper-making and printing were transferred to Western Asia and eventually reached Europe.

The art of paper manufacture was first introduced from China to Kocho (Turfan), and Chinese paper was imported to Samarkand as early as 650. Among the T'ang soldiers captured by the Arabs at the battle of Talas in 751 were craftsmen skilled in the manufacture of paper, textiles, and gold and silver ornaments.<sup>5</sup> According to the Arabic sources, the paper-makers among the Chinese prisoners were taken to Samarkand to start a local production. Samarkand became a centre for paper-making after the eighth century and thence the paper industry passed to Baghdad.<sup>6</sup>

## BUDDHISM

The dominant religion of the period was Buddhism. From the third to the ninth century, a vigorous Buddhist civilization developed in all the ancient oasis kingdoms, such as Khotan, Kucha, Agni and Kocho. Buddhist monasteries and temples were built with donations from members of the local royal family, aristocrats, government officials and other rich people. The kings of the various oasis states became ardent patrons of Buddhism (see [Chapter 18](#)).

During the 630s and 640s, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hsüan-tsang made the round trip to India by way of the Western Regions. In the account of his travels, he notes that in the areas south of the T'ien Shan, some places have 'a dozen or so *chia-lans* and about

<sup>4</sup> *Tu-lu-fan chu-tu wen-shu*, 1985–90, Vol. 1, pp. 181, 187; Vol. 2, pp. 18, 60.

<sup>5</sup> Du Huan, 'Travels', in Tu Yu, 1988, chapter on the Frontier Defence. On this work, see Rotours, des, 1932, pp. 84, 99, 149.

<sup>6</sup> Maillard, 1973; 1983; Litvinsky (ed.), 1992; Yaldiz, 1987.

2,000 monks', while other places have 'more than 100 *chia-lans* and over 5,000 monks'.<sup>7</sup> (*Chia-lan* is a Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit word *saṅghārāma*, meaning 'Buddhist monastery'.) Hsüan-tsang also remarks that Hinayana Buddhism is prevalent in Kucha, while the Mahayana is represented principally in Yarkand and Khotan.

Buddhism was also widespread among the Türks. The Western Türk *kaghan*, T'ung *yabghu*, was converted by an Indian monk called Prabhakaramitra. Several other minor Türk rulers also showed respect for, and devotion to, Buddhism.

Most Buddhist monasteries and temples in the Western Regions were built along streams in mountain valleys, or in cave-temples. The best-known of these are the Kyzyl in present-day Bay, the Kumtura, the Kyzyl-kargha and Simsim cave-temples in the Kucha area and the Bezeklyk and Toyoq cave-temples in Turfan. In addition, there are large Buddhist temples and stupas built on flat ground, such as the ruins of the Su-bashi monastery in Kucha,



FIG. 3. Kyzyl. Wall painting. Photo: © R.M.N./© Daniel Arnaudet.

<sup>7</sup> Hsüan-tsang, 1985, Ch. 1, pp. 48, 54. See also Litvinsky (ed.), 1992.



FIG. 4. Kumtura. Bodhisattva. Musée Guimet, Paris. Photo: © R.M.N./© Jacques L'Hoir/Jean Popovitch.

the large monastery of Miran, and Ming-oi at Karashahr, and monasteries at Kocho and Yar in the Turfan area. More than 1,000 Buddhist caves have been located in presentday Xinjiang region, most of them with painted murals. For example, the walls and ceilings of every cave in the Kyzyl cave-temple have murals illustrating Buddhist legends and representing the finest expression of Graeco-Irano- Gandharan art (Fig. 3). There are also styles typical of T'ang painting in the murals of the Kumtura and Bezeklyk cave-temples. Some temples had clay figures of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (Fig. 4), but most are badly damaged.

## The kingdom of Tibet

As mentioned above, a Tibetan royal line sprang up in the Yarklung valley in the first quarter of the seventh century. The power of this family – the Yarklung- spu-rgyal –

spread rapidly to the north-west and the constant disputes between the numerous war-like clans, fragmented throughout the rugged valleys of southern and central Tibet, were quickly ended. The Sumpa (Supi), the Greater and Lesser Yang-t'ung (Upper and Lower Zhangzhung), the Bailan, the A-zha (T'u-yü-hun) and other peoples of Chiang stock were annexed in quick succession. The great reserve of energy of the Tibetan people, tempered by an austere life in the wilderness, was set free and directed to politico-military expansion. This extended over the vast space of the Koko Nor–Tibetan plateau and lasted for some two and a half centuries.

Early in the seventh century, gNam-ri-srong-brtsan (c. 570–620), *btsan-po* (chief) of the Yar-klung-spu-rgyal clan, had already laid the foundations of the new monarchy by bringing more than a dozen clans under his rule.<sup>8</sup> But the feudal customs of the tribal chieftains and the noble clans remained semiautonomous, although incorporated into the comparatively centralized state under the *btsan-po*. The death of gNam-ri-srong-brtsan provoked a rebellion. The brilliant new era in Tibetan history was ushered in with the enthronement of Srong-brtsan sgam-po (c. 620–649 or 650), gNam-ri's son, as *btsan-po*. The new ruler quickly unmasked all intrigues and quelled all signs of open revolt. In 633 Srong-brtsan sgam-po moved the royal residence from Lho-kha to Lhasa ('place of the god'), a step of great strategic importance for the rapid expansion that followed.

According to Tibetan and Chinese records, Srong-brtsan sgam-po undertook sweeping legislative reforms with the assistance of his chief minister, sTongbrtsan yul-bzung of the mGar clan (Lu-dong-zang in Chinese literature, ?–667). sTong-brtsan served the *btsan-po* until the latter's death, and his office of Great Minister (*blon-chen-bo*) was filled by his descendants for decades. The *btsan-po*, fully aware of the presence of four powers in the monarchy – majesty (*nMgathang*); magic (*dBu-ring*; literally, the 'helmet' worn by the *btsan-po* at sacred functions); religious law (*chos*), which originated with the Bon-po; and political authority (*chab-srid*), which the ruler exercised through his officials<sup>9</sup> – set up new political institutions. Many of them were modelled on the T'ang administrative system and regulations: the ministers had, for example, credentials and emblems of rank. The Great Minister and the vice-Great Minister (*blon-chen-vog- ma*) were followed by the 'inner' (*nang-blon*) and 'outer' (*phyi-blon*) ministers and a supreme judge (*shal-ce-pa chen-po*), each of whom had the insignia accorded to his position in the hierarchy. The 'inner' minister handled the internal affairs of the court while the 'outer' minister was in charge of relations between subordinate clans, external reconnaissance and the launching of punitive

<sup>8</sup> There seem to have been 18 noble clans. A list of them is found in *Bka' thang sde lnga*, c. 1285, Vol. 5, fol. 7. See Tucci, 1949, pp. 737–8; Chang Kun, 1959–60, pp. 130–1, 153, note 10.

<sup>9</sup> Hoffman, 1975, p. 389.

expeditions. The supreme judge oversaw the administration of justice; his position was similar to that of the ‘minister of punishment’ under the T’ang dynasty. In addition, there was an official (*mngan-pon*) who was responsible for the budget and a chief accountant (*rtsis-pa-chen-po*) in charge of book-keeping. Laws were drawn up, some of which were designed for the half-cultivator/halfherdsman activities of the population, as evidenced by the fragmentary Tibetan scrolls of legal documents found in Dunhuang.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most important reforms seems to have been the integration of the entire Tibetan territory, setting up 5 *ru* (*dbu-ru*, *g’yo-ru*, *g’yas-ru*, *ru-lag* and *sum-pa-ru*) and 61 *stong-sde* as unified military and administrative units.<sup>11</sup> This institution was supplemented by the oath-of-alliance, a characteristic practice among the Tibetans when subordinates pledged their loyalty to the nobles, and the nobles in their turn swore allegiance to the monarch.

The king had subjects who were ‘near to his heart’ and others who were ‘distant from his heart’.<sup>12</sup> They regularly exchanged oaths of fealty, accompanied by a ceremony of sacrifice, a minor one every year and a major one every three years. The words of the oaths, apart from expressing a feeling of awe for the deities called as witnesses, stipulated the rights and obligations of all the allied parties. This system – forming alliances by oaths and even concluding treaties – brought great advantages to the newly founded Tibetan regime. Such oath-taking rituals between the *btsan-po* and his ministers appear to have become a fixed procedure in the political life of Tibetan society. In addition, when the *btsan-po* proclaimed some important policy, the oath-taking ceremonies were often used as the form for such proclamations. For example, Khri-srong lde-brtsan (755–797) held such ceremonies twice during his reign to make public the royal edict on advocating Buddhism. The ceremonies were also staged when establishing relations with the T’ang or with neighbouring clans.

Judging from the lists of names attending several large-scale alliance ceremonies, and found in the Tibetan chronicle discovered in Dunhuang, the system seems to have been instrumental in realizing the dynastic aspirations of Srong-brtsan sgam-po and his successors. The essence of these alliances was their military strength: by joining the alliance, every clan inevitably became a military unit. The *stong-sde* and *ru* were in effect the designations for different clans under the command of the ‘Supreme Commander of all Troops under Heaven’.

<sup>10</sup> For example, ‘Compensation Law on Hunters who Injure a Third Party’, a Tibetan manuscript in the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris, Fond Pelliot tibétain, PT 1,071.

<sup>11</sup> See Bacot et al., 1940–46; Uray, 1962, pp. 353–60.

<sup>12</sup> Stein, 1972, p. 132.

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## RELATIONS WITH T'ANG CHINA

In 634 the Tibetans established diplomatic relations with the T'ang court, sending envoys and tribute. Soon afterwards, Srong-brtsan sgam-po was granted a marriage with a Chinese princess, Weng-cheng Kung-chu, known to the Tibetans as Mun-chhang Kong-cho; she was sent to Tibet in 641. Then followed a period of friendship lasting two decades between the Tibetans and the Chinese. Young people of the Tibetan nobility were sent to Ch'ang-an to study the Chinese classics, Chinese books were brought to Lhasa and there were constant attempts to translate and adapt Chinese classics and literary works into Tibetan. Some of these translated texts can be found in the Tibetan manuscript hoard of Dunhuang. At the same time other clans, including the Yangtong, Türgesh, Bolor and Nepal, also built up relations with Tibet by marriage.

Within half a century the power of the Tibetan state had expanded westward towards the Pamirs, eastward towards Su-chuan, Yun-nan (Nan-chao) and northward to impinge upon the Koko Nor area and the Gansu corridor. After 663 Tibetan military incursions, especially those led by the ministers and commanders of the mGar clan (sometimes in alliance with the Western Türks), posed a direct threat to, and exerted pressure on, the Chinese western and southwestern frontier. With the deliberate aim of counterbalancing Tibetan influence over the Western Regions, the T'ang court organized successive expeditions against the Tibetans both in the Gansu corridor and in the Tarim (670, 675–679, 692). In 692 the T'ang decided to station some 30,000 'protective' soldiers permanently at the Four Garrisons of the An-hsi Protectorate-General to defend the Tarim area and the communication route against the Tibetans in the south and their Türk ally in the north.

In 710 another Chinese princess, Chin-ch'eng (Kyim-sheng Kong-cho), was granted to a Tibetan king. According to some sources, in 742 she gave birth to a son who was destined to become king: this was Khri-srong lde-brtsan. Under his reign, the Tibetans once again ruled over Gilgit (Drusha). The possession of Gilgit and its neighbour Baltistan was of great strategic importance: it allowed the Tibetans to control the main route from Kashgar through the Mintaka pass to Kashmir and the Indus valley, and made it possible for Tibet to establish direct contact with the Turkic tribes of the Tarim area and the Arabs of Central Asia. At the same time, tribute was paid twice by the Pala kings of Magadha and Bengal to Tibet, in 755 and in 756. According to some records, the Tibetans may also have invaded India in search of relics of the Buddha in Magadha and set up an iron column on the Ganges.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Stein, 1972, p. 64.



In the reverse direction, the Tibetans took the opportunity of the An Lushan rebellion (755–763) to invade China proper and even captured Ch'angan, placing a boy-emperor on the T'ang throne for 15 days (in the eleventh month of 763). Then, availing themselves of the withdrawal of the Chinese garrison, they succeeded in occupying the Gansu corridor and the Four Garrisons of the An-hsi Protectorate-General (from 763 onwards). Thus the Tibetans attained their long-desired objective: complete control of the route through the Gansu corridor and the Tarim to Central Asia, Kashmir and northern India; and through modern Afghanistan to Transoxania and Iran. Their military presence in these vast areas also allowed them, from 791 onwards, steadfastly to oppose the challenge posed by the Arabs in Central Asia.

### AGRICULTURE, ANIMAL HUSBANDRY AND CRAFTS

Tibet's high-altitude environment, with a diversity of local conditions, gave its economic life a two-fold structure of cereal culture and animal husbandry, with people frequently alternating between the two modes of life according to the environment and the season. All political and cultural centres were located in regions of intensive cultivation. The rise of the first Tibetan monarchy was mainly due to its control of the most fertile cultivated regions, where highland barley, wheat, buckwheat and beans were grown. Two yoked oxen were used for ploughing, and irrigation and drainage techniques were known.

Tibetan pastoral stockbreeding was more advanced than agriculture. Domesticated animals comprised yaks, a yak-and-cow hybrid, goats, sheep, horses and a few pigs and dogs. The yak played (and continues to play) an important role – indeed, one could go so far as to say that without the yak, there would be no Tibetan culture. These animals roved around during spring and summer in search of pasture and water, and during autumn and winter they stayed on pastureland. Stories of levying 'taxes for oxen legs' reveal one aspect of the development of animal husbandry.

Tibetan metallurgical techniques (in iron-working) had reached a very high level, suggesting a development over several centuries, and the skills of quench-hardening and grinding had already been mastered. Needless to say, these techniques ensured an ample supply of suits of armour and sharp swords for the troops. Even today, in their religious rituals, Tibetans still use large bells and elaborate golden utensils cast during the time of the ancient Tibetan monarchy.

In the mid-seventh century, in response to an earnest request from Srongbrtsan sgampo and his Chinese bride, Chinese craftsmen and artisans trained in the manufacture of rice alcohol, mill-stones, paper, ink and glass were sent to Tibet. Silk-worms and tea were



also introduced. Simultaneously, Tibet fell under the influence of its western and southern neighbours: from India, for example, came astrological calculations and medical science.

### A TIBETAN SCRIPT AND GRAMMAR

The most outstanding attainments during the reign of Srong-brtsan sgam-po were the creation of a Tibetan script and the introduction of Buddhism. According to Tibetan tradition, Srong-brtsan sgam-po sent a young minister named Thon-mi-sambhota, *sambhota* of the Thon-mi clan, with other youngsters to the Kashmir area to study languages. After many vicissitudes, the minister succeeded in learning Sanskrit and several other languages of ancient India; he then made comparative studies of them before creating an alphabetic system for the writing of documents. Thon-mi-sambhota is also credited with compiling a Tibetan grammar on the Indian pattern.

### INTRODUCTION OF BUDDHISM

Before the introduction of Buddhism the religion of the Tibetans was Bon-po, which had many similarities with other primitive religions. Some scholars believe that Bon-po is a variant of Shamanism, while others insist on seeing the country of Zhang-zhung as the home of the Bon-po religion. Since most of Tibet's neighbours were Buddhist, the influence of Buddhism was strong. The introduction of Buddhism was marked especially by the occasion when Princess Weng-cheng of the T'ang dynasty and Princess Khri-brtsun, daughter of the king of Nepal, each brought a figure of the Buddha into Lhasa. Both princesses were married to Srong-brtsan sgam-po and propagated Buddhism among the Tibetans. After several generations, the aboriginal religions in the Tibetan area were either gradually displaced or became integrated into the more systematic and better-knit philosophical system of Buddhism.

A decisive event in the history of Tibetan Buddhism was the adoption in 791 by King Khri-srong lde-brtsan of Indian Buddhism as the state religion. It was the culmination of a process in which Indian Buddhism replaced not only the Bon-po religion but also counteracted the influence in Tibet of the Chinese Ch'an tradition of Buddhism. The main task was the translation of Buddhist writings into Tibetan and the unification of Buddhist terms (the drafting of the *Mahāvvyut-patti* in 814), an activity vigorously supported by the king. He was greatly helped by one Shang-shi, who brought Buddhist books to Tibet from China, and by gSal-snang, governor of a Tibetan province bordering Nepal who not only brought in Indian books but also persuaded the great Mahayana teacher Santiraksita to spend some time in Tibet. He ordained seven young men as 'the chosen ones' (*sad-mi*) to continue his work. On Santiraksita's departure, his place was taken by the towering figure

of Padmasambhava from Uddiyana. During the same period, the great Buddhist temple of bSsam-yas was completed (755?). Important though the advance of Buddhism was, it did not go unhindered. Nor did it eliminate Bon-po beliefs, which were vigorously supported by some factions of the feudal nobility.

### THE FINAL YEARS

Since 789 the Tibetan troops had been pushing towards Beshbalyk and were in fierce confrontation with the Uighurs. As the two sides plunged into an evenhanded war, their relations deteriorated irretrievably. The protracted warfare constantly forced the Tibetan regime to enlist Nanshao troops from the Yunnan to fight on the frontier. The Tibetans found themselves increasingly isolated, however, and the domestic situation reached a crisis. Although the army remained powerful, it could not avert the regime's final defeat. The palace coup of 846 revealed the serious corruption in the Tibetan ruling class, and frequent factional conflicts and religious strife sapped the morale of its troops and caused the collapse of the once powerful alliance of clans. Under the pressure of uprisings by the nobles and the common people in various areas, as well as in their own territory, Tibet's glorious early history of more than two centuries came to an end.