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Compassionate Occupation: Yongzheng's Purposes for Relocating the Qing Garrison Away from Lhasa

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Abstract

At the Kangxi emperor's command, Qing troops occupied Lhasa in 1720. The Yongzheng emperor withdrew them shortly after his accession. This apparent reversal of Kangxi's policy toward Tibet has been characterized as rushed and ill-considered. Yet, in his edict sent to inform the Dalai lama of the garrison's relocation, Yongzheng stressed that his decision was meant as a continuation of his father's intentions toward Tibet. Focusing on the emperor's consideration for popular support and different strategies of Qing control, this paper argues that Yongzheng's decision was aimed at preserving a strategy originating in the 1690s, aimed at routing power away from the position of the Dalai lama, by the gradual inclusion of local elites of the Khoshud-Tibetan state into the Qing hierarchy, with the goal of extending Qing control over Tibet. The relocation of the garrison was a prerequisite to the continuation of Kangxi's policy, rather than its abrogation.

Keywords

Qing History – occupation – Tibet – Inner Asia – Yongzheng – Kokonor – empire

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1 Introduction

On 29 April 1723, the Yongzheng emperor sent his envoy Orai to Tibet, to inform the Dalai lama of his decision to relocate the Qing troops garrisoned in Lhasa. The edict Orai carried emphasized the violence of the Jungar occupation, since the Jungars had “taken Lhasa and ruined the Doctrine, laid waste to the land of Tibet and caused the most terrible suffering.”¹ By contrast, Yongzheng wrote, his father the Kangxi emperor had restored peace in Tibet, and left Qing troops there to protect Lhasa against possible new assaults. No longer: the garrison would be relocated.

So ended a brief occupation. In 1720, Qing troops had expelled the Jungars from Lhasa and remained there. The Qing occupation of Tibet, necessitated by the sudden Jungar conquest of Tibet in 1717, raised new questions. How best to handle Tibet in the future? Would it become an integral part of the empire, and what might that look like? It came down to how the court might effectively, but also (cost-)efficiently, maintain control over affairs in Tibet and the Tibetan Buddhist world. The garrison’s withdrawal has been characterized as a rushed implementation of retrenchment, using the “pretext of cost.”² It is therefore qualified as a regrettable and momentary lapse in Qing policy toward Tibet,³ and a “hasty decision,”⁴ altogether a reversal of the Kangxi emperor’s designs on Tibet.

The total break and consequent loss of control suggested here are incongruent with Yongzheng’s letter to the Dalai lama, which stressed continuity. Secondly, it disagrees with considerations raised in deliberations between Yongzheng and his officials. Despite its relocation, the garrison was still meant to accomplish its original goals, and its shift was precipitated as much by developments in Lhasa as by events in Beijing. Drawing on Qing memorials, Qing historiography, supplemented by Tibetan materials, I argue that rather than a rejection of Kangxi’s policies, Yongzheng navigated a variety of factors to maintain effective and efficient imperial control over Tibet and continue his father’s policy aimed at the integration of Tibet.

1 *BSMLY*, 257–61.

2 Dai, *The Sichuan Frontier*, 93.

3 Dai, 92–94.

4 Petech, *China and Tibet*, 79–80.

2 Origin and Purpose of the Garrison

To move beyond an understanding of the garrison's relocation as a simple cut of expenditures, it is necessary first to elaborate on the garrison's original purpose upon its establishment in Lhasa. Qing troops arrived in Lhasa in 1720 in what was the emperor's second attempt to expel the Jungars from Tibet. A first Qing expedition had been disastrously annihilated two years earlier. In 1720, Qing armies consisted of twelve thousand troops, accompanied by an unspecified number of Khoshud Mongols from Kokonor.⁵ The first division of troops entered Lhasa on 24 September 1720.⁶ On 18 December, the emperor issued the command for withdrawal.⁷ The emperor's son Yinti, who had led the expedition, then ordered three thousand Mongol banner and Green Standard troops to stay in Lhasa. He wrote to his father in Beijing that "although we may have pacified Tibet, it is all the more important that we establish a garrison here."⁸ The emperor was evidently in full agreement: the three thousand troops were soon joined by another thousand.⁹

Guarding against a new Jungar occupation of Tibet was clearly one aim of the garrison, but its ulterior purpose is revealed in later communications. Yansin, one of the generals of the second expedition, and Nian Gengyao, governor general of Sichuan and Shaanxi, wrote in 1723 that no plans had originally existed to establish a garrison in Lhasa. Only upon emphatic requests from the Dalai lama and the Tibetan population were soldiers left behind. Since the Dalai lama was then twelve years old, his politically involved father likely made the request on his behalf. It is questionable that "the Tibetan populace" (*Ma. tanggû t i urse*)¹⁰ in Lhasa would, or could, make such a request, and the use of the term "populace" begs the question who had voiced the "people's" wishes to the Qing commanders. Probably, one or more of the Tibetan aristocrats had used popular support as a pretext for retaining Qing troops, thus securing

5 SZRSL, 286:16r–17v; JGBBJB, 6:51v–52r; 7:9r–10r. The army was originally composed of eight thousand troops, including a thousand Manchu and Mongolian banner troops each, two thousand Green Standard troops, two thousand indigenous troops and two thousand Tibetan troops from Kokonor. The emperor ordered the taijis of Kokonor to bring an additional five to ten thousand troops of their own. Later, the emperor deemed his army of eight thousand too small, and ordered three thousand one hundred troops stationed around the Tsaidam basin, as well as four hundred Chakhar and five hundred Alashan Khoshud troops to join the expeditionary force, for a total of twelve thousand.

6 JGBBJB, 8:2r–v.

7 8:37r–38r.

8 8:47r–v.

9 9:1v–2r.

10 Yansin and Nian Gengyao, "Zou bao che Chamuduo difang bingding."

their own position. Nevertheless, it was true that the Tibetan population had received the Qing troops with great joy and enthusiasm. If indeed the popular support was to be a convincing argument for leaving troops behind after the first two months of their presence in Lhasa, that cheerful atmosphere must not have abated just yet, and a genuine anxiety about a Jungar return must have been felt in Lhasa.

If Yansin's confidential message to the emperor is to be believed, therefore, a crucial reason for the garrison's creation was to appease the Tibetans in Lhasa – a factor that emerges as constantly present, even decisive, in Qing reevaluations of the Lhasa garrison.

3 Reasons for Relocation

Already when doling out the orders, the emperor foresaw that the presence of the garrison might cause issues with the food supply in Lhasa. With the arrival of additional troops therefore also came the order to send back the five hundred Kharachin and Ongniyud troops in the event that issues with the food supply should arise.¹¹ Nevertheless, Qing records do not make any further mention of difficulties procuring sufficient provisions for the garrison. The awareness that problems might emerge draws further attention to the value the emperor clearly attached to a garrison in Lhasa. Why, if at first the garrison was deemed necessary, did Yinzhen then relocate it?

While the relocation of the Lhasa garrison fits perfectly into Yinzhen's well-documented policy of financial reform,¹² which included the withdrawal of frontier troops,¹³ curtailing expenses were by no means Yinzhen's primary concern with regard to Lhasa.¹⁴ A rescript on a memorial from Yansin and Nian Gengyao makes clear that Yinzhen had not made up his mind (*Ma. gūnin toktobure unde*) about the future of the Lhasa garrison.¹⁵ Another consideration took precedence. The garrison had grown into an oppressive burden for

11 *JGBBJB*, 8:49v.

12 Zelin, *The Magistrate's Tael*, 1–5; Elliott, *The Manchu Way*, 275; Dai, *The Sichuan Frontier*, 154. Yongzheng's reforms provided the empire with the financial stability and means to enable the later military campaigns and conquering expeditions under the Qianlong emperor. See Guy, "Ideology and Organization in the Qing Empire," 373; Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, 919; Huang, *Autocracy at Work*, 272.

13 Perdue, *China Marches West*, 140–42; Chen, "Kangxi Yongzheng Shiqi Qinghai Zhujun Kaoshu," 54.

14 Chen, "The Qing Court's Troop Deployment," 50.

15 Yansin and Nian Gengyao, "Zou bao che Chamuduo difang bingding."

the inhabitants of Lhasa, first of all because of its size. It consisted of four thousand troops, in comparison to a local population of about five thousand households,¹⁶ a disbalance that severely disrupted the local economy.¹⁷ Reportedly, prices for some goods had tripled,¹⁸ and the local production of foodstuffs did not suffice to sustain such a sudden increase in the population. The emperor had therefore ordered for provisions to be transported to Lhasa from Sichuan and Yunnan. Qing soldiers sold off some of these to the locals, further increasing tensions.¹⁹ In addition, unrest among the Tibetan population was exacerbated by new taxes and corvée labor that the Qing commanders had imposed.²⁰ Therefore, Nian Gengyao and Yansin proposed that moving the garrison to Chamdo (T. *chab mdo*) would allow a military intervention in central Tibet if necessary, and “while we can thus protect the Dalai lama, we will also be able to win over the hearts of the Tibetan people, and save on provisions.”²¹ From Chamdo, the garrison could still accomplish the original goals of Qing policy, namely guarding against a Jungar attack and fostering the support of the Tibetan population, at lesser costs.

The constant concern about the support of the local population, which the Qing troops reportedly had enjoyed ever since entering central Tibet in 1720,²² went hand in hand with the Qing emperor’s position as unchallenged universal Buddhist ruler. The Qing emperor and commanders cultivated their image as saviors of Tibet from the malevolent Jungars.²³ In due course, the Qing succeeded. The sentiment is echoed in later Tibetan writings, such as those of the third Thukun lama, who described the Qing occupation of Lhasa as

16 Estimates of the population of Lhasa differ substantially and are complicated by the monastic and mobile parts of the population. The number of five thousand households is drawn from the imperial gazetteer composed in the later half of the eighteenth century, see *QLYTZ*, 413:6v. Early twentieth century visitors estimated the city’s population at about thirty thousand inhabitants. Blondeau and Yonten Gyatso, “Lhasa, Legend and History,” 26. As Blondeau and Yonten Gyatso write, the population had been stable for centuries. The Buryad pilgrim Gombozhab Tsybikov estimated the population of Lhasa at about ten thousand around the same time. See Tsybikov, *A Buddhist Pilgrim*, 83.

17 Ippolito Desideri described it as “almost a flood of money,” which caused rapid inflation. See Desideri, *Mission to Tibet*, 257, 703 n. 726.

18 Petech, *China and Tibet*, 76.

19 Yansin and Nian Gengyao, “Zou bao che Chamuduo difang bingding.”

20 *MBTJ*, 193r.

21 Yansin and Nian Gengyao, “Zou bao che Chamuduo difang bingding.”

22 *JGBBJB*, 8:46r–47r; Wang and Chen, *Meng Zang Minzu Guanxi*, 193–94.

23 *JGBBJB*, 8:2v: Upon arriving in Lhasa, general Galbi called together all lamas of the monasteries, and, in his words, instilled in them an understanding of the emperor’s most benevolent intentions. Desideri echoes this aim *Mission to Tibet*, 257. See also Shakabpa, *One Hundred Thousand Moons*, 1:437.

“a medicine for the governance and teachings in Tibet.”²⁴ Yet, to remain accepted as their benevolent savior, the emperor could not afford to alienate the population of Lhasa. Not only was there always the danger of a popular repudiation of any type of Qing presence, in the worst scenario the young Dalai lama might be moved to condemn the emperor for the suffering he caused, and empower other rulers as his protector-lord as the fifth Dalai lama had in the past.

In light of this, Tibetan popular support, or the lack thereof, might have repercussions for the emperor's unchallenged position as Buddhist ruler.²⁵ It was the wheel-turning monarch's responsibility to release all living beings from suffering, and prevent it where possible. Yinzhen's predecessor Xuanye had emphasized this in his letters to the Dalai lama and the Panchen lama, always in contrast to the malevolence of the Jungars. The quadrilingual stele that Xuanye had erected in front of the Potala palace also stated that the leaders of the Mongol and Tibetan communities lauded the emperor for “causing to flourish once again the doctrine, which the Mongols had always revered and respected, and by completely liberating them from suffering allowing all the peoples of the lands of Kham, Tsang, and Ü to live in peace.”²⁶ When Yinzhen informed the Dalai lama of the relocation of the Lhasa garrison to Chamdo, he therefore stressed that his decision was informed by a desire for perpetuating his father's compassionate intentions and avoiding suffering:

Lest the wayward and dispersed Jungar criminals come to harass you again, I stationed my troops in Lhasa as protection. That is now two to three years ago. Although we transport the provisions for consumption of this garrison, as well as all manner of other goods from the Inner regions, the land of Tibet is only small, and it produces only little. It is not sufficient for many people to use. The price of food has therefore risen, and if that leads to suffering for the people, then I feel that the situation conflicts with the compassionate intention of my father the August Khan.²⁷

For the people in Tibet, the withdrawal spelled alleviation of additional tax burdens and corvée labor, and likely stabilization of the economic situation. It may be reasonably assumed, then, that the decision was welcomed by the

24 *NTKS*, 79.

25 See also Ishihama, “New Light on the ‘Chinese Conquest of Tibet,’” 24–25.

26 *JGBEJB*, 9:44r; See for some examples of the Kangxi emperor's emphasis on his benevolence as Buddhist ruler *BSMLY*, 1:213–220; 229–34; 241–46.

27 *BSMLY*, 1:257–262.

general population, who had reportedly been “brought to suffer to the point of enmity because of the taxation and mandatory labor.”²⁸ Previously, Lhasa’s population had experienced Jungar rule as tyrannical.²⁹ Although that was one reason that the Tibetans had warmly welcomed Qing troops to Lhasa, the emperor now had to take care not to lose the heart of the Tibetan population, for he and his frontier officials were well aware that losing their support might drive the Tibetans back into the arms of the Jungars. Since Qing troops had returned the Dalai lama to Lhasa (another cause for their popularity), that scenario involved the possibility that the Dalai lama’s endorsement might fall upon a new Jungar khan.

Yinzhen had not had the intention of giving up Qing control over Tibet, and he still did not when he relocated the garrison. The relocation was only possible because Tibetan loyalty was secured in other ways, for which he built upon precedents set by his predecessor.

4 Continuity in Qing Policy toward Tibet

With the hindsight of the conflict that emerged in Tibet in 1727, the removal of the garrison has been typically equated with the loss of control over Tibetan affairs. This interpretation rests upon the assumption that the garrison was stationed in Lhasa to subdue and force into submission the Tibetan population.³⁰ As should be clear from the above, this was not the garrison’s purpose. Qing control over Tibet had been won through military campaigns, but, as Sabine Dabringhaus has observed, the longevity of this control could not depend on the conventional policies of settling farmer-soldiers because of geographical and climatic conditions.³¹ Therefore, Yinzhen relied on his father’s previous policies for Tibet and Kokonor, which dated back decades: the integration of local elites in the imperial hierarchy, intertwining their interests with those of the empire, while diminishing the power of the Tibetan Buddhist clerical elite, and integrating the region closer with the empire through the introduction of the expectation of loyalty to the emperor in exchange for titles and material rewards.³²

28 *MBTJ*, 193r.

29 *JGBBJB*, 7:29v; 8:46r–47r.

30 Schwieger, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China*, 125; Feng, “Zhuzang Dachen Tongxia Xizang Zhujun Yanjiu,” 9; Petech, *China and Tibet*, 79.

31 Dabringhaus, *Das Qing-Imperium Als Vision Und Wirklichkeit*, 51.

32 See also Elverskog, *Our Great Qing*, 65–66.

The Kangxi emperor had made a first, unfortunate attempt at such integration in 1694. Tibetan regent Sanggye Gyatso concealed the fifth Dalai lama's death and forged letters in the Dalai lama's name to request a seal and title for himself, since "the Dalai lama had grown old, and the regent has taken over the responsibility of managing all the country's affairs. Please, do him the honor of awarding him a seal."³³ Unaware of Sanggye Gyatso's deceit, Xuanye made use of this request to endorse the authority of the regent in Tibet, fostering closer ties with the regent, the representative of temporal power in Tibet. When it then turned out that Sanggye Gyatso had deceived him, the emperor turned instead to others in the political realm of Tibet to attempt to solidify his grasp on the region.

Aside from courting the Panchen lama and pressuring him to visit Beijing, the emperor summoned the nobility of Kokonor to his encampment in Ningxia while he was on military campaign. These Khoshud taijis were the direct descendants of Gūshi khan. Although they were nominally subject to the Dalai lama and the Khoshud khan in central Tibet, they managed their domain in Kokonor and Kham independently.³⁴ In 1698, the taijis of Kokonor, led by Gūshi khan's last surviving son Trashi Batur, pledged their loyalty to the emperor in exchange for investiture with titles. The emperor bestowed imperial attire appropriate to their new ranks.³⁵ He included the taijis in the hierarchy of Qing imperial rule, receiving them as subjects in a gesture of imperial grace, to be indefinitely repayed.³⁶ Their annual performance of the pilgrimage to court was expected, and they were later enlisted in Qing efforts at the conquest of central Tibet.³⁷ In this manner, Xuanye detached them from the Dalai lama's authority, depriving the Dalai lama of the powerful military forces of the Khoshud in Kokonor. After Lhazang khan ousted Sanggye Gyatso and came to rule Tibet in 1705,³⁸ Kangxi endorsed his rule in 1709.

At every turn, the emperor attempted to achieve two aims. The first was a separation of religious authority from secular political and military authority.³⁹ The Great Fifth Dalai lama had both been the political ruler of central Tibet,

33 WABB, 13:42r.

34 JGBBJB, 14:24v–25r.

35 WABB, 47:28r–37v, 70r–74r; FBYL, 10:19v–20r.

36 Atwood, "Worshiping Grace": The Language of Loyalty in Qing Mongolia."

37 MHWGBZ, 81:22v–23r.

38 Borjigidai, "1705 Nian Xizang Shibian de Zhenxiang"; Schwieger, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China*, 115–18.

39 Li Yongqiang views the attempt at this separation primarily as an effort of the Yongzheng emperor. The Kangxi emperor's policy toward Tibet sets a precedent for Yongzheng's effort. See Li, "Shitan Qing Yongzheng Shiqi dui Xizang Zhengjiao Fenli de Changshi."

Tsang, and Ngari, as well as the highest lama of the Gelukpa order. Uniting in his person religious and worldly authority made him a Bodhisattva-ruler. As the supreme arbiter in the Tibetan Buddhist world, his influence knew almost no bounds. The Tibetan Buddhist world became under his guidance a hierarchic world order akin to that of the Qing emperors. As the Desi had, in Xuanye's eyes, abused the Dalai lama's name and title to mobilize the Tibetan Buddhist world against him, it was crucial to neutralize the Dalai lama. Excluding his successors from governmental decisions was the first step, for it would, for instance, remove the Dalai lama from the command of military forces – a prerogative of which the fifth Dalai lama had availed himself.⁴⁰

Secondly, the emperor attempted through the inclusion of Tibet's non-clerical elites to achieve a greater integration with the empire through alignment of that elite's interests with his own. He was most successful in this objective after 1720, when Tibet was put under Qing control and the commanders in Lhasa abolished the position of regent, the highest executive position in the Tibetan government, normally appointed by the Dalai lama. In its stead, they created a council of ministers to rule over Tibet, the Kashak (T. *bka' shag*). The Qing commanders appointed as ministers (or Kalön, T. *bka' blon*) Tibetan aristocrats who had shown loyalty to the Qing and led troops against the Jungar occupation. At its creation, the Kashak had three members, all aristocrats hailing from the different regions of Tibet. Each received imperial titles in conjunction with his appointment to the council.⁴¹ Their joint rule, initially together with the Qing generals of the garrison, excluded the seventh Dalai lama from participating in government.

Because of the creation of the Kashak, the emperor could continue to exercise control in Tibet even after the withdrawal of the Qing garrison from Lhasa. We see evidence for this in the role of the Kashak after the departure of the garrison. First of all, it was enlarged with two new members: Pholhané, whose service had been especially meritorious in resisting the Jungars, and Jarrawa, a representative of the clergy with good connections to the young Dalai lama's father. Yinzhen also explicitly reiterated to the Dalai lama that he should "be compassionate and loving, by trusting the Kalön to manage affairs and lighten the tax burden on the people of Tibet."⁴² In this way, Yongzheng

40 In addition to Güshi khan's role in the conquest and unification of the regions of Tibet, the Dalai lama later also dispatched troops to fight in military engagements. See Petech, "The Tibetan-Ladakhi-Moghul War (1681–83)."

41 *JGBJB*, 8:47v–48r; Sperling, "Pho-Lha-Nas, Khang-Chen-Nas," 204–5.

42 *BSMLY*, 1:257–262.

succeeded in subordinating the Dalai lama's authority in the Tibetan Buddhist world to the temporal authorities in Tibet, whose loyalty he commanded.

To ensure the councilors' obedience, a greater degree of integration and alignment with his objectives, Yinzhen followed his father's example in installing another check on loyalty. The Kangxi emperor had employed envoys and resident agents to influence, monitor, and report on Tibetan affairs. In 1709, for the first time the emperor sent a Qing official to Tibet to streamline affairs. His envoy Heshou had been appointed as "governor of Tibetan affairs" (Ch. *guǎnlǐ xīzàng shìwù shìlǎng* 管理西藏事務侍郎).⁴³ Kangxi provided imperial support for Lhazang's rule after reassuring himself of Lhazang's support, and only then recognized the Dalai lama Lhazang installed.⁴⁴ An even more stringent degree of control was exercised by Yinzhen's agents in Lhasa in the 1720s. Orai, whom the emperor had dispatched as the emissary bringing the order for relocation of the garrison, was to remain in Tibet together with some staff. He took part in the Kashak, and Pholhané's biography confirms that Orai was indeed an influential force in Lhasa. When word reached Lhasa of the uprising of Lobzang Danjin in Kokonor, Orai proposed that the Tibetans should raise a defensive force. Pholhané acquiesced and spent months along the banks of the Nagchu.⁴⁵ When the danger of Lobzang Danjin's rebellion abated, Orai was immediately recalled to Xining – another indication that the Qing presence in Tibet was aimed at external threats, rather than internal policing. Oci was sent to Lhasa to replace Orai. For the emperor, these officials became his main source for information on Tibetan affairs, and their judgments and recommendations with regard to Tibetan affairs were implemented after their return to Beijing.⁴⁶

5 Conclusion

Starting from the 1690s, the Qing emperors had endeavoured to expand their control over Tibet. The inclusion and cooptation of local elites within the Tibetan state was crucial to this. After the occupation of Lhasa in 1720, maintaining control became contingent upon a variety of circumstances. Crucially, Qing control over Tibet was not contingent upon maintaining a military presence, but upon the integration of elites, the subordination of Tibetan religious

43 SZRSL, 236:12r–v; 241:10v–11r; DMGD, 7:236–8.

44 Borjigidai, "1705 Nian Xizang Shibian de Zhenxiang," 91.

45 MBTJ, 207r; Petech, *China and Tibet*, 83.

46 SZXSL, 30:3r–v; 52:29v–30v.

authority to temporal authority, overseen by resident Qing officials who represented the emperor's interests, and the careful monitoring of popular sentiment. To avoid antagonization of the population of Lhasa against imperial involvement, relocating the garrison therefore became a prerequisite for Qing control.

Characterizing the relocation as a hasty measure to reduce expenditures disregards the considerations of Qing frontier policy, not least with regard to the navigation of popular sentiment. The Yongzheng emperor's relocation of the Lhasa garrison altogether presents a more nuanced image of Qing expansion, in which we are reminded not to conjure up an image of Qing emperors solely as autocratic despots able to impose their will, but having to negotiate and consider the circumstances of both elites and common people to successfully extend control.

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