According to custom, with the death of the thirteenth Dalai Lama, a regent was appointed to guide the government until the new Dalai Lama could be identified, educated, and established at the head of the government. As Radreng Hotoktu Jampel Yeshé Tenpé Gyeltsen (d. 1947) took power, a rival locus of power emerged under Tsipön Lungsharwa Dorjé Tsegyel (1881–1940). The latter, who had been exposed to a great deal of modern and progressive ideas while he served as the physician and chaperone of a group of four boys sent to England in 1912–1914. Back in Tibet, a group of reform-minded allies gathered around him, and his position continued to be elevated by virtue of the fact that the Dalai Lama himself perceived the need for modernization. With the death of the Dalai Lama, Lungshar’s reform group, Alliance on the Side of Happiness (skyid phyogs kun mthun), sought to create a more representative democracy. Although his movement can be seen as attempting to diminish the influence and power of the noble classes, it was depicted as a communist organization. Shakabpa reports that at the time he wondered if the accusation of its communist sentiments was accurate. By the time he wrote this book several decades later, he seems to have become quite sympathetic towards the group:

However, after careful consideration, it appears that since Tsipön Lungsharpa lived in England for about a year, the new reform organization was progressive, following the lead of the developed nations, and not a communist movement seeking to overthrow the government. Moreover, whenever reform movements initially arise in every country in the world, unless it is supported by a large military force, it always suffers defeat.

In the event, Lungshar was punished by being blinded, and others were demoted and sent into exile.

The Chinese government, which had not had an official presence in Tibet since 1913, used the Dalai Lama’s death as a pretext for sending an
official funerary delegation. The Chinese representatives were empowered to renew relations with Tibet, but the Tibetan cabinet insisted that negotiations be undertaken in light of the 1914 Simla Convention. The Chinese resisted negotiating within the terms of that agreement, not wanting to affirm the Tibetan autonomy it implied. Meanwhile, the Tibetans took pains to treat the Chinese delegation in the same way as the British and other delegations to the funerary ceremonies as a way of fortifying the perception that they were all similar in being foreign powers.

In the mid-1930s, a faction under Bomdawu Topgyel became upset when Tupten Künpel was exiled; they seized weapons and declared Kham independent. The Do Governor suppressed the uprising but the offenders fled, seeking the protection of Chinese authorities. This was another impediment to Nationalist Chinese efforts to open a dialogue with the Tibetans. However, they were also preoccupied with their battles against the communist armies of Mao Zedong (1893–1976) then engaged in the Long March. Both the Tibetans and the Nationalist Chinese regarded the communists with disdain.

As the search committee was formed to seek out the new incarnation of the Dalai Lama, Shakabpa himself accompanied the party seeking visions in the oracle lake called Lhamo Latso inhabited by Pelden Lhamo, the protector spirit charged with ensuring the well-being of the Dalai Lamas. What the regent and others saw in the lake contributed to the emerging notion of where the new incarnation would be found and under what circumstances.

In 1935, the Tibetan government commenced negotiations with the sixth Panchen Lama Chökyi Nyima (1883–1937) over his return to Tibet. Shakabpa represents the “primary obstacles to his return” in terms of Chinese efforts to interfere in Tibetan customs. The Nationalists had granted the Panchen Lama the elevated title of “Special Cultural Commissioner for Western Regions,” phrasing that evoked both Tibetan subservience to China and a status for the Panchen Lama equal to that of the Dalai Lama lineage. The Tibetans could not accept either of those premises. Finally, while the Tibetan cabinet wanted him

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