CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

BEGINNING OF THE REVOLT AGAINST THE CHINESE IN KHAM, GRADUAL SUPPRESSION OF THE ENTIRETY OF TIBET, AND NECESSITY FOR THE DALAI LAMA AND OTHERS TO SEEK THE PROTECTION OF INDIA

TRANSLATOR’S INTRODUCTION

As China tightened its grip on Tibet throughout the 1950s, the Communists made a great show of proclaiming that reforms would be introduced into Tibet at whatever pace the Tibetans decided. Yet, in fact, weapons and soldiers poured into the country along with the revolutionary bureaucrats who would implement Chinese policy. Meanwhile, Tibetan dissatisfaction with Chinese land and agricultural reforms, forced conscription into the Chinese army, monastic taxes, and many other measures multiplied as the 1950s proceeded, particularly in Amdo and Kham in eastern Tibet. Human rights violations, such as the execution of high lamas, came to be reported more often. Statements were issued in the name of the Pañchen Lama urging that the reforms must be initiated immediately.

Various Tibetan organizations were established to resist the Chinese, and in 1958, these efforts erupted into armed opposition in Kham led by the National Volunteer Defense Army under the command of Amdruk Gompa Tashi (1900–1964). The Chinese insisted that Tibetan troops be sent to put down the rebellion, but the Tibetan cabinet refused to order Tibetans to attack Tibetans. The Chinese attempted to attract prominent figures, like the Karmapa, Cabinet Minister Ngapö, the leaders of the great monasteries, and others, to intervene with the ever-increasing resistance, but their entreaties were ineffective. In Shakabpa’s narration, the National Volunteer Defense Army continued to make surprising gains, but it could not resist the greater number of troops fielded by the Chinese or their superior weapons and supply lines.

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For a compelling and detailed account of the emergence of the Tibetan resistance movement, see Mikel Dunham, Buddha’s Warriors: The Story of the CIA-Backed Tibetan Freedom Fighters, the Chinese Invasion, and the Ultimate Fall of Tibet (New York: Penguin, 2004). See also p. 442 below.
When the Dalai Lama had visited India, he had invited Prime Minister Nehru to come to Tibet to witness what was taking place there. Initially the Chinese consented to have him come, but they later reneged, perhaps out of concern that he would report the real situation in Tibet to the rest of the world. Shakabpa suggests that the Chinese might have threatened Nehru while dressed up as Khampas. In the end, he did not come, and few others were able to witness events within Tibet.

During the latter part of the 1950s, the Tibetan government was forced to strip a number of Tibetans of their citizenship, including Tsepon Shakabpa. The organization founded by Shakabpa and the Dalai Lama’s older brother Gyalo Thondup, the Committee for Tibetan Social Welfare, sent representatives to many countries around the world, hoping to galvanize international support for the Tibetan cause. The Chinese leaders in Tibet pressured the Tibetan government officials to condemn and restrain the so-called “reactionary” Tibetan resisters. Shakabpa singles out one person, Tsekhen Drönchewa Palha Tupten Öden (1910–1983), for special praise, saying that he was a pillar of the government and ceaselessly faithful. He was the chief attendant of the Dalai Lama, and served as the gatekeeper for which people and what information reached the Dalai Lama.

In March of 1959, the Dalai Lama was invited to the Chinese military encampment for a theatrical performance; ominously, the Chinese insisted that his customary bodyguard not accompany him. Under Chinese pressure, the date of March 10th was selected as the day the Dalai Lama was to attend the “performance.” Everything about the method of inviting the Dalai Lama violated customary protocol, and swiftly, all of Lhasa was abuzz with fears that their treasured leader would be arrested or worse. A vast crowd encircled his residence at Norbu Lingkha Palace to prevent the Chinese from seizing him. Tensions elevated as the Chinese officers demanded the Dalai Lama come to their compound and as the crowd became increasingly protective. Fearful that events would devolve into violence, the cabinet unsuccessfully attempted to disperse the crowd. Most of the Tibetan cabinet ministers except Ngapö left Norbu Lingkha Palace to meet with the Chinese officers in an effort to pacify the situation; Ngapö Ngawang Jikmé was already at

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\(^{b}\) Below, p. 1008, Shakabpa asserts that delegates visited eighty countries not allied to China. This statement seems hyperbolic, but I have not been able to verify or disprove the assertion.

\(^{c}\) See p. 1008 below.