



Tashi Tsering: The Last Mongol Queen of ‘Sogpo’ (Henan)

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ABSTRACT

Tashi Tsering was the last *qinwang* or queen of a Mongolian enclave in south-eastern Qinghai called Sogpo or Henan. This outline of her and her family's history illustrates the different roles played by a woman leader during the enforced transition of her community from a traditional to a modern society. As a representative of the traditional local élite she was positioned as a symbol of her nationality within the framework of the emerging Chinese state, and, when the Communists came to power in and 'liberated' Henan, she adapted rapidly to the changing social order. She therefore participated in the process of modern state construction, in her case in the effort to transform Henan from a small Mongolian kingdom into a 'minority nationality autonomous county' in the Communist era. Like many traditional leaders, she was killed in the Cultural Revolution, to be posthumously reinstated only in the 1980s, when she became seen again as a representative of 'Mongolness' in general. She and her daughter, also given high position, worked with the modern nation-state that absorbed them, but as emblems of ethnicity or gender remained constantly vulnerable to larger political forces.

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One afternoon in October 1966, a group of people arrived at a woman's house in Xining, the capital of Qinghai province. Without much explanation, they took her to a large, crowded room in which she became the target of a 'struggle session', during which she was beaten and verbally abused by a mob of angry people. When the session was over she was confined, together with her thirteen year old daughter, in a cold, dark room in which the two of them spent the night. The next morning a car was waiting outside for them. After a few hours drive, she was again made the object of a struggle session, involving further beatings followed by shouting and spitting at her. After this she was again taken by car in a southerly direction. The party arrived at its final destination, where the third struggle session was held. At the end of that session, she was once more left alone in a room with her daughter. Late that night, the daughter sensed that something was wrong with her mother and went to call for help. By the time she returned to the room, her mother had died.

The woman who died that night was Tashi Tsering, the last Mongol queen of 'Sogpo', now a county of Qinghai Province known in Chinese as *Henan xian* and in Tibetan as *Malho dzong*.¹ Her life, which lasted from about 1920 until her death during the early months of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, is the subject of this paper. The area over which she had ruled since the age of twenty, nowadays known as the Henan Mongolian Autonomous County,² is referred to

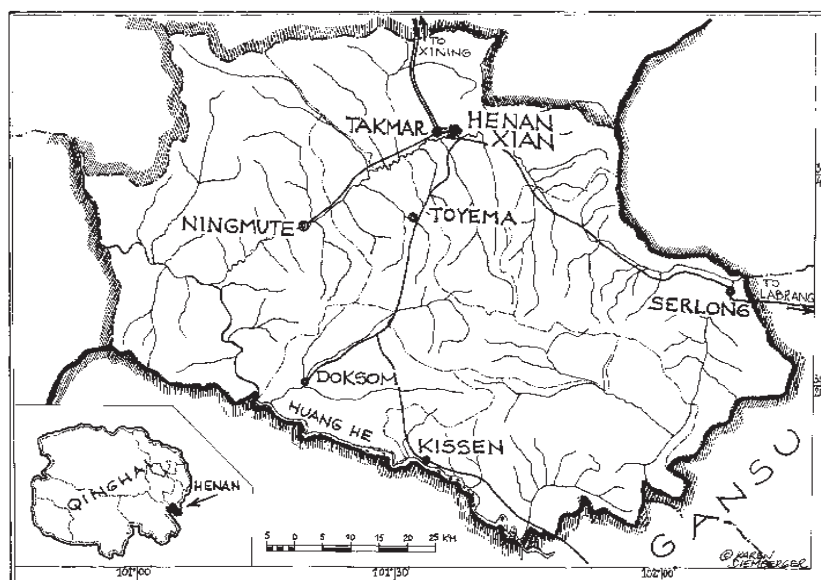


FIGURE 1. Henan County, Qinghai Province (K. Diemberger)



FIGURE 2. Sogpo/Henan. Children preparing felt in Serlong (photo: H. Diemberger)





in Tibetan literature as 'Sogpo', a term implying simply 'the Mongolian place'.³ Today this county is inhabited by some 26,000 people.

Tashi Tsering was not only the leader of what had been earlier known as the Four Mongolian Banners of Sogpo or Henan but she also belonged to what we might call a 'lineage' of political women and rulers in that community. Her mother, Lumantso, had been in effect the ruler of Sogpo/Henan for a long period, and Tashi Tsering's daughter is currently a vice-president of the Qinghai Women's Federation, having served earlier as a deputy leader of Sogpo/Henan county.⁴ Yet, this lineage was never reckoned one as such, nor did it represent a standard model for succession. Tashi Tsering's mother acquired her position of political power as the young widow of the former ruler. She seems to have set her daughter on the throne through a process of political manipulation, and against the will of the male political leadership of the Four Banners. Tashi Tsering's daughter in turn appears to have achieved a very senior position despite the fact that she had three older brothers. She played her part within the process in the 1980s whereby the Chinese state invested in what might be called the reconstruction of Mongolness in her area. In this paper we look at some of the internal and external factors that prompted these women to take on these political roles which, although not unheard of,⁵ were unusual for women to hold in local Mongolian or Tibetan communities. Furthermore, the lives of these women as leaders offer a particular perspective on the complex relationship that this area has had with the Chinese state, allowing us a glimpse of the role played by Tibetans and Mongols in the intricacies of twentieth-century history in China's Northwest.

One major factor in that history was simply the difficulty faced by traditional leaders in their often extensive efforts to adjust to the rapid change that their communities were forced to undergo. Tashi Tsering's life bears testimony to the dynamics of alterity and powerlessness experienced by such a local élite in mid-twentieth-century China. Did she, as an élite in a pre-modern society, succeed in bridging her historical legacy with the modern Chinese state and how did the modern state incorporate traditional leaders such as her into the new system? This study aims to elucidate the relationship between a local élite, Republican attempts to control such leaders and Communist efforts to secure power in the Sino-Tibetan frontier areas.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Tashi Tsering could trace her ancestry back to Güüshi Khan, the mid-seventeenth-century Hoshuud ruler whose domain stretched from present-day western Inner Mongolia to central and western Tibet, including at its heart all of the Khökhnuur area. At the beginning of the eighteenth century a group of Hoshuud Mongols, under the leadership of Güüshi Khan's grandson Darji Boshogt, settled along the





FIGURE 3. *Qinwang* Tashi Tsering





upper reaches of the Yellow River. His son Chagaandanjin (Tib.: Tshe dbang bstan 'dzin) received the *qinwang* title from the emperor Kangxi and became thereby the first *qinwang* to rule over this area.⁶ This title was a mark of the highest possible recognition that could be conferred by the Qing emperor, but at the same time it marked the diminution of Mongolian power as a result of the administrative reforms that followed the uprising of Lobsangdenjin (Tib. Blo bzang bstan 'dzin) in 1723. Since Mongolian and Tibetan areas were divided, Chagaandanjin *qinwang* found his domain reduced to the four banners that constituted the Sogpo/Henan area. The authority of the Mongolian rulers in the area, which had originally been independent from the power of the Qing throne, had thus yielded to a situation whereby the Qing title had become the acknowledged marker of political leadership and determinative for succession, definition of territory, and genealogy. As such it is found in the titles that we find on official seals in Chinese, Tibetan and Mongolian and in numerous genealogical accounts. Nevertheless, the political structure of Sogpo/Henan up until the twentieth century remained to a large extent effectively autonomous and self-governing.

This was in part because the Qing emperors rapidly lost interest and even influence over the Sogpo/Henan banners, so that after the death of the third *qinwang* in 1771 they no longer conferred the *qinwang* title on the local ruler.⁷ Instead, although this is often glossed over in genealogical reckonings, for several generations only lesser titles were awarded. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, alliances with various Mongol banners became again an important factor for China's rulers in their dealings with the Northwest. The Republican government therefore resumed the imperial custom of bestowing high titles in their attempts to keep the frontier areas under control, and the *qinwang* title was thus conferred for the first time in over a century on a Sogpo/Henan ruler – Paljor Rabten, the father of Tashi Tsering – in an apparent attempt at the renewal, at least in formal terms, of the early Qing relationship with the Sogpo/Henan leaders.

The source that we mainly use to outline the events that affected Sogpo/Henan and the lives of its leaders is a text recently published in Tibetan by the county's Political Consultative Conference (the CPPCC), which we shall refer to here as *The Records of Malho County in Tibetan*.⁸ This text was compiled on the basis of earlier materials, including a number of nineteenth-century religious histories such as dBal Pandita's *Rgya Bod Hor Sog gyi lo rgyus* (History of the Chinese, Tibetans and Mongols), as well as a local history compiled in 1979 by a Lama known as Alag Shingsa on the basis of oral accounts and other sources at his disposal that were later destroyed in a fire at Labrang monastery.⁹ For events that took place after 1949 we will follow a number of official and semi-official Chinese sources, particularly the *Henan xian zhi* (*The Annals of Henan County*).





THE EIGHTH RULER AND THE REGENCY OF LUMANTSO

Paljor Rabten, an adopted son of the seventh Mongol ruler, was enthroned in 1887. He took as his wife the Tibetan Dekyi Palzom, niece of the fourth Jamyang Zheba, the hierarch of the famous monastery of Labrang which had been founded by the Sogpo/Henan rulers nearly two centuries earlier.¹⁰ In 1913 Paljor Rabten received the title of *qinwang* from Yuan Shikai, president of the new Chinese Republic. The Mongols of Sogpo/Henan accepted titles from the new rulers of China without apparently being concerned about the implications of the political developments then taking place in China, and without involvement in any of the reformist or pan-Mongolian movements current during that time.¹¹

Paljor Rabten's wife passed away without giving birth to a son who could continue the line, and the eighth *qinwang* thus married Dekyi Palzom's younger sister Lumantso, who is said to have born him two children, Kunga Paljor (1914–1940) and Tashi Tsering (1920?–1966). The sudden death of Paljor Rabten in 1916 left Lumantso in a difficult position – within a brief period of time she had lost not only her husband but also lost her powerful uncle, the Fourth Jamyang Zheba, the head of Labrang monastery. This situation destabilised the area and made her regency barely manageable. Lumantso therefore left the royal residence and stayed for some three years with the female incarnated Lama, Gungru Gungtsen of Gengya.¹²

During this period the assembly of the banner's leaders, who were known by the Mongolian title of *jasag*, took care of the administration, but the economy and political strength of the area declined.¹³ According to a contemporary of Tashi Tsering, Lumantso did not want to remain in Sogpo/Henan and preferred to devote herself to the religious life.¹⁴ Gungru Gungtsen persuaded her to return to Sogpo/Henan and soon afterwards, by 1920, Lumantso had re-established herself as the *de facto* ruler over the area. She reigned as the Regent of the area until her son, Kunga Paljor, reached maturity some ten years later.

Lumantso, who, in the final part of her life, took religious vows as a nun, is described by many local people as a highly respected and deeply religious woman who was also a skilful governor. Numerous factors played a role in her ability to take on and to exercise leadership in Sogpo/Henan: her ability at winning the support of the banner's leaders, her skill at diplomacy with Sogpo/Henan's powerful neighbours, the support of her kinsmen, and the spiritual confidence and esteem acquired by living with Gungru Gungtsen. She thus remained one of the key players in local politics until her retirement to a monastic life in 1954.

Lumantso's political pragmatism was demonstrated by the alliance she formed with Ma Bufang (1902–1975), the powerful Muslim warlord and governor of Qinghai. With the tacit consent of the Republican government, Ma Bufang had carried out a series of brutal raids in Tibetan areas, killing numerous people and destroying monasteries. The fact that monasteries in Sogpo/Henan did not experience the same destruction that affected Tibetan monasteries elsewhere in





Qinghai is attributed by locals to Lumantso's skill in managing relations with this man. *The Records of Malho County in Tibetan* reports:

In this year [1941] Tsang monastery was attacked by the robbers of Ma [Ma' jag, the army of Ma Bufang]. At that time, Lumantso met the general Ma Bufang and requested him not to destroy the monastery but to protect it. In the second month of the same year, she let the monastic community gather again and re-established the custom of blowing the conch-shell [i.e. performing religious ceremonies]. In early summer, Lumantso led the heads of Tsang *Gonpa* [monastery] and others to Siling [Xining] to meet the chairman [Ma Bufang] and had him release two hundred prisoners.¹⁵

THE NINTH MONGOL RULER, MA BUFANG AND ABA ALO

The period of Lumantso's regency and the reign of Kunga Paljor were dominated by difficulties in relations with the local chieftains and the local warlord, in particular with Aba Alo and the Ma family.¹⁶

The family of Ma Bufang originated from the area of Hezhou in Gansu province, which was the base of the larger lineage known as 'the Ma family warlords' (*Ma junfa*). The three best known of the families in Gansu with the family name Ma were those led by Ma Zhan'ao, Ma Haiyan and Ma Qianling, and it was the son of Ma Haiyan, Ma Qi (1869–1931), who moved to Xining and set up a military force around that town.¹⁷ Ma Qi's revenue was mostly dependent on the wool and skin trade which he carried out with the cities on the east coast of China.¹⁸ Despite commercial interactions with the Tibetans, his relations with the different Tibetan tribes were marked mainly by confrontation.

The death of the fourth Jamyang Zheba, the religious leader of Labrang monastery, in 1916 became the spark of a long-lasting conflict between the Tibetans connected to Labrang and the Ma family. The incident, which resulted in a split within the Tibetan leadership in Labrang, originated from an internal conflict between the manager of the monastery, Li Zongzhe, and the monastery's Regent.¹⁹ The governor of Gansu had sent Ma Qi to settle the issue but, instead of negotiating, he used military force against the Regent. As a result, the local Tibetan leaders from Labrang and the neighbouring areas became divided between those who followed Ma Qi and those who chose to ally with the Mongol ruler of Sogpo/Henan, the patron and original founder of the monastery.

Relations with the Ma family and the Tibetans from Labrang deteriorated further in 1918 when Ma Qi sent his younger brother Ma Lin to attack Labrang with a military force armed with modern weapons. The Tibetans were easily defeated by the Hui (Chinese Muslim) soldiers and Ma Qi subsequently stationed his troops in Labrang.

The situation in Labrang stabilised when the reincarnation of the fourth



Jamyang Zheba was identified as a member of the Alo family. After moving from Lithang, Sichuan Province to Labrang area in 1919, the Alo family slowly rose to power. Within the Alo family, principal power at that time rested with Lobsang Tsewang, known widely as ‘Aba Alo’:

The eldest Alo son, who became the most important military commander and political figure at Labrang, was Losang Tsewang (b. March 1903), known to his community as Aba Alo, to his intimate family as Zicai, and to the Chinese as Huang Zhengqing. [...] As a child Aba Alo learned some Chinese school etiquette and enjoyed the benefits of his father’s access to Chinese officials. He brought this awareness and his knowledge of nomad lifestyles to Labrang. He eventually rose to be the chief government official at Labrang, endorsed as such by his brother the Fifth Jamyang Shaypa, the religious authority, and later by the Chinese authorities in Lanzhou, who gave him the title of Huang *Siling*, approximately ‘Commander Huang’.²⁰

After their arrival in Labrang, the Alo family leaders asked Ma Qi to withdraw his troops from Labrang. But it was only in 1928, when the Nationalist government formally established Qinghai as a province, that the Tibetans were freed from the influence of Ma Qi. Negotiations with the Nationalist government resulted in Labrang being included in the province of Gansu, while Ma Qi was appointed as the governor of Qinghai province. This political move helped in diminishing Ma Qi’s interference in the affairs of the monastery. After Ma Qi’s death in 1931, his younger brother Ma Lin became the governor. Ma Lin, however, moved to Mecca to work with the Muslim modernist movement and was replaced in 1936 by the second son of Ma Qi, Ma Bufang, who remained the governor of Qinghai until 1949.²¹

Kunga Paljor’s short life (1914–1940) as the ninth Henan *qinwang* was dominated by forging political alliances with the Chinese, the Hui, and the Tibetan chieftain of Labrang. As the main patron of Labrang monastery, he asserted some authority among the Tibetans in that area. But with the rise of Aba Alo’s political power in Labrang, the relationship between the Mongol ruler and Labrang slowly deteriorated. Aba Alo has left his own description of how the relationship with the Mongol ruler worsened:

I would like now to describe the relations between the Henan *qinwang* and us. Gunga Huanjue’er [Kunga Paljor], the 28th Henan *qinwang*, had his domain located to the south of the Huanghe [Yellow River] and Tongren [Rebgong] in Qinghai. However, the royal palace was located near Labuleng [Labrang] monastery. Before 1927 when we were asserting ourselves against Ma Qi, some parts of the king’s subjects were sympathetic to us and joined us in the fighting. Other subjects were more sympathetic to the Ma family. At that time, there was one small headman called Suomam ka among the Mongol Banner tribes who helped us. When he went back to his own place he kept good relations with those who had maintained good ties with the Ma family. However, the royal palace tried to





arrest him and he escaped. From that time on the relationship between him and the royal palace was hostile. When in June 1934 Jiamuyang [Jamyang Zheba] received the title and great celebrations were held, Suoman ka came to Labrang to convey his congratulations and to participate in the festivities. He stayed a short while in my commander's quarters and when he went back, he passed by the gate of the royal palace. He was then killed by some servants of the royal palace. All the monks of Labuleng [Labrang] thought that if someone who had come to congratulate their great Lama was at the same time killed, this was a great insult to the monastery. For this reason the monks angrily tried to surround the royal palace and kill Gunga Huanjue'er [Kunga Paljor]. [...] However, since that time some hostility between Labuleng [Labrang] and the royal palace existed and they did not visit each other anymore. Gunga Huanjue'er found it hard to live in Labuleng and moved to Tongren [Rebgong]. This was exactly what Ma Bufang was hoping for. He immediately appointed Gunga Huanjue'er as a commander and gave him 200 guns in order to use them against us. However, since the Henan *qinwang* was the main patron of Labuleng, the relationship between the two parties remained peaceful. Later, Gunga Huanjue'er sometimes came to Labuleng and spent some days in his palace.²²

Among the Mongols in Sogpo/Henan, however, it seems that Aba Alo was seen as a threat to their own territory. In the county annals the rift is described in terms of Aba Alo's efforts to gain control over the Mongol Banner:

The Fifth Jiamuyang Living Buddha [Jamyang Zheba] was a younger brother of Huang Zhengqing [Aba Alo] who followed him when he moved to Xiahe [Labrang]. He [Aba Alo] gradually took over all political and military power. Huang Zhengqing [Aba Alo] tried in many ways to get control over the Henan Mongolian Banner and to drive them to his side. Since the *qinwang* Gongge Huanjue [Kunga Paljor] did not submit to him, Huang Zhengqing did not manage to achieve his political aim. The Ma bandits [led by Ma Bufang] were afraid of Huang Zhengqing expanding into the Mongolian Banner and Ma instigated Gongge Huanjue against Huang Zhengqing and gave him 200 guns so that he could establish his own army. Gongge Huanjue was then appointed as the commander of this army.²³

It seems that Ma Bufang had managed to win over Kunga Paljor to join an alliance to fight against the Communists in the early 1930s. Ma had skilfully managed to set up the headquarters of this operation in Sogpo/Henan and had appointed Ma Yuanxiang as the deputy commander.²⁴ Soon, other Tibetan troops from Rebgong (Tongren), Trika (Guide), Kayba Sumdho (Tongde) and Bayan (Hualong) joined the alliance and formed a Southeastern defence-front in Qinghai. Kunga Paljor was appointed as the commander of that Mongol-Tibetan force supporting Ma Bufang. It seems that it was by joining forces with Ma Bufang that Kunga Paljor was able to re-establish himself as the local ruler. Thus, ac-



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cording to the *Records of Malho County in Tibetan*, ‘this wang [Kunga Paljor] was respected by the chairman of Siling [Ma Bufang], Aba Alo of Gansu and the Tsang lama [the head of the monastery of Tsang]. He [Kunga Paljor] was therefore known as *wang tsenpo*.’²⁵

Kunga Paljor’s unexpected death in 1940 remains an unsolved mystery. According to some locals, Kunga Paljor was poisoned by Aba Alo, while others attribute his death to an unintentional injury inflicted by one of his men during an attack by robbers.²⁶ In the chronicles of Aba Alo, it states that Kunga Paljor died in his palace from excessive alcohol consumption.²⁷ It is almost impossible to trace the exact events, but the different versions of his death reflect the political tensions between Sogpo/Henan and Aba Alo. With the death of Kunga Paljor, his younger sister Tashi Tsering succeeded as the ruler of Sogpo/Henan and was left to deal with the political complexities of the area.

TASHI TSERING, THE ‘QUEEN ELIZABETH OF QINGHAI’

It is intriguing that some sources write of Tashi Tsering’s birth date as 1920 and yet give the date of her father’s death as 1916. There seems to be, however, no controversy regarding her legitimacy. This leaves two possible explanations open: either there is a mistake in the given date or her biological father was a kinsman sharing the same ‘bone’ (*rus*) as her father. This explanation would make her genealogical descent legitimate in Mongolian and Tibetan eyes, and indeed some oral accounts identify Tashi Tsering’s biological father as the son of the *jasag* of Serlong, who was a brother of Paljor Rabten.²⁸

Little is known regarding Tashi Tsering’s early years, except that she is said to have received private tuition in traditional subjects including classical Tibetan and calligraphy. But in many ways it seems that she was inspired by the innovations that were gradually penetrating the Sino-Tibetan borderland. ‘She used to be interested in technical innovations and in science, quite different from other women [...] and she considered education to be the most important thing,’ recalled her son, adding that she also learnt to play the harmonium and used to smoke ostentatiously.²⁹ During her youth, however, no-one seems to have envisaged that she would undertake a political career, and when Joseph Rock visited the area in 1937 she passed completely unnoticed. Yet three years later, she formally ascended the throne as the tenth ruler of Sogpo/Henan amid celebrations performed at the palace of the *qinwang*. At first, however, there does seem to have been a controversy regarding her succession to the throne.³⁰ We were told that after the death of her brother, the local chieftains representing the three other banners gathered in a formal meeting to decide on the succession, since a formal female leadership initially seemed unacceptable.³¹ It is unclear how Lumantso managed to determine the final decision. Some people claim that she called upon the support of Ma Bufang, others say that Ma Bufang was interested



in keeping this family in a leading position since he had already been able to rely on the full support of Kunga Paljor.³² Whether through Lumantso's skilful internal diplomacy or through external intervention, Tashi Tsering was eventually chosen as the tenth Henan *qinwang*. Given her young age, Tashi Tsering's mother once again took over the rule of the area. Despite the apparent doubts and tensions at the time of her appointment no-one with whom we spoke during our research questioned Tashi Tsering's legitimacy as the *qinwang*; perhaps this was because some sixty years later she had been canonised retrospectively as a local Mongol heroine in the area.

When Tashi Tsering ascended the throne she was still unmarried and the choice of a husband represented an important political move in the delicate game of alliances. According to the recollections of local people in Sogpo/Henan today, there was a choice between a neighbouring headman named Washu and the son of Aba Alo, the new lord of Labrang. One local account described her situation in this way:

As a woman she faced some difficulty in being accepted as a leader and thus the choice of a husband was of special importance. Washu was a man from the Washu clan and was seen as a hero – like someone out of the Gesar epic. But he had no financial means and political connections that could allow him to become a future leader. The son of Aba Alo was a spoilt man but his father had a powerful network. She thought that in order to protect her kingdom she needed that political network...³³

The choice of Aba Alo's son as the future husband of their new queen seems to have evoked some ambivalent feelings among the local population, perhaps because of his personal reputation or because of Aba Alo's ongoing claim to the area. Tashi Tsering finally married Gonpo Namgyal, the son of Aba Alo. Known also as Amgon, he was always addressed by locals as the '*magpa*' – the son-in-law or bridegroom – even long after their marriage.

The Records of Malho in Tibetan gives this account of the marriage:

In 1943 the *wang* Tashi Tsering married Gompo Namgyal, nephew of the fifth Jamyang Zheba, Tenpa Gyaltsen, and the son of Lobsang Tsewang [Aba Alo]. Several hundred horsemen from the three Hoshon [Banners] went to collect and escort the son-in-law. A great celebration was held in the *Urge* and from that time on Gompo Namgyal helped her take care of political matters.³⁴

There are, however, variant views regarding the marriage. Aba Alo claims that the Henan ruling family had suggested the match:

After Gongge Huanjue [Kunga Paljor] passed away... Lu ke [Lumantso], the mother of the king, took care of everything. [...] Zhaxi Cairang [Tashi Tsering] and my son Huang Wen Yuan [Gompo Namgyal] were approximately the same age. The royal palace suggested that they should marry and asked my view on the matter. They said that they would be able to give an explanation to Ma Bufang. In order



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FIGURE 4. Tashi Tsering, the Tenth *Qinwang* of Henan/Sogpo; her brother, the Ninth *Qinwang* (left) and her father, the Eighth *Qinwang* (right). Photographs displayed in a chapel of the royal residence in Labrang (partially rebuilt after its complete destruction).

to make good relations as had existed before, I agreed, and Ma Bufang did not create any obstacles. The wedding celebrations were held in Xiahe [Labrang], and the Directors of the Civil Affairs Department of both Qinghai and Gansu Provinces came as witnesses. Many people from both provinces came to celebrate and this marriage became very famous. After the celebration, Lu ke [Lumantso] was appointed a member of the Northwest Political and Military Committee. My son Huang Wen yuan [Gompo Namgyal] was appointed vice-director of the Animal Husbandry Department of Qinghai Province.³⁵

This contrasts with the version given in the *Henan xian zhi*, which offers a very different view of the nature of the alliance, one which underlines the ambitions of Aba Alo:

After Gongge Huanjue [Kunga Paljor] died, Huang Zhengqing [Aba Alo] wanted his own son to become the son-in-law of the Mongolian royal family. The Ma family did not approve of this marriage. Huang Zhengqing therefore gave numerous presents to the Ma family. Ma Fei [Ma Bufang] had no choice and [after the marriage] chose a friendly approach to Huang Zhengqing and accepted Huang Wen yuan [Gompo Namgyal] as an adopted son. [...] Huang Zhengqing and his son made relations between Gannan [southern Gansu] and Sogpo/Henan difficult. After Liberation, the father and son of the Huang family and some leading





figures suggested that the Mongolian banner should belong to Gannan [southern Gansu]. This shows that they had still retained further aims.³⁶

In brief, the *Henan xian zhi*, based on Chinese army documents from the 1950s, is critical of the expansionistic ambitions of Aba Alo, seen as the initiator of the marriage, and underlines Ma Bufang's opposition. In contrast to this, the biography of Aba Alo presents the marriage as initiated by the Mongols and fully endorsed by all the parties involved. It is difficult to know what really lies behind these discrepant versions, which are still the object of discussion among local intellectuals. They definitely reveal different stands on the issue of Mongol-Tibetan alliances at different times, including aspirations to an autonomous position for Sogpo/Henan. More importantly, however, they reveal the change that this marriage entailed for the whole area. The death of Kunga Paljor and the marriage of Tashi Tsering with Aba Alo's son redesigned the map of local alignments: the front against the Communists that had been built by Ma Bufang, together with the Mongols and some of the Tibetans, was definitely broken. Aba Alo seems to have taken a much more flexible political stand and, as we shall see later, we know that southern Gansu was an early base for communist activities.

Meanwhile, the situation in Sogpo/Henan was about to be overtaken by larger events in China as a whole. In the final years of the Republican era, Yuan Shikai began to feel the need to win over more than before the support of the Mongols and the Tibetans. Sun Yatsen's political vision of a multi-ethnic China made it imperative for his successors to gain the support of these non-Chinese nationalities in order to present the image of China as a unified and multi-ethnic state. In a period in which both Mongols and Tibetans developed independence movements, the Republican government undertook several steps to secure Mongolian and Tibetan loyalty. These strategies ranged from the granting of titles to the promotion of local rituals such as the worship of the Khökhnuur Goddess or the worship of Chingghis Khan in Lanzhou.³⁷ Other symbolic gestures, such as Chiang Kaishek's gift of a plaque with the inscription '*gro drug rnam 'dren gling*' (the place leading all living beings to liberation) to Chogar monastery in Sogpo/Henan in the earth-hare year (1948), aimed to show the government's support for the Buddhist religion.³⁸ At the same time, the Communist forces were advancing in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands and were making promises which met with Tibetan and Mongolian aspirations. The Republicans and the Communists were therefore competing for the support of the Mongols and the Tibetans.

In view of these political considerations, efforts were made by the Republican government to further integrate the local Mongol rulers. On 12th March 1947, Tashi Tsering was elected as the local representative to the National Congress, and she, along with her husband Huang Wen Yuan, went to Nanjing to attend the session of the National Congress. During their time in the city they both became members of the Guomindang.³⁹ At that time, Tashi Tsering was celebrated in the national press as the 'Queen Elizabeth of Qinghai'.⁴⁰ Given the



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extent of her domain, this title sounds at least exaggerated, even if she was one of the representatives for the Qinghai area. We can infer that the association of Tashi Tsering with the prestigious British royalty, the emphasis on her gender, and the description of her as a queen from the chronically under-represented Mongols of Qinghai, were used to exaggerate her symbolic function as a marker of ethnic Mongolian support for the Guomindang, far beyond the scope of her real power and options. For the state, she was therefore symbolically important at a time during which different Mongol groups expressed very differing political alignments, veering either towards the Communists, the Guomindang, or independence.

THE LIBERATION OF GANSU AND QINGHAI

In 1926, a branch of the Chinese Communist Party of Gansu convened a meeting to promote culture (*wenhua zujinhui*) for all the Tibetans residing in Gansu and Qinghai.⁴¹ This was the first formal event in which the Communists sought support from the Tibetans, and as a result of that meeting schools were set up by the Communists in Labrang, Golok and other areas. In August of the same year, the Communists were able to set up a 'Great Alliance of the Gan[su] Qing[hai] Tibetans' (*Gan Qing Zangmin datongmeng*) to gain support in the fight against the Ma family and against their control over large parts of Gansu and Qinghai. The Communists were therefore able to gain the support of the Tibetans by building on the existing opposition to the Muslim warlords.

While trying to enter Qinghai, the left wing of the Western Route Army was defeated in 1937 in southern Gansu; they then chose another route from the Northeast by passing through Qilian. The Communists suffered considerable losses, and only about 500 soldiers remained alive by the time they 'liberated' Qinghai.⁴² It seems that the Communists had already sent people ahead of them to infiltrate the various local communities; local accounts indicate a widely held suspicion that the secretary of Tashi Tsering was on the payroll of the Communists.⁴³

When the victory of the Communists was foreseeable, the Mongols turned to the new regime, which was promising nationality, autonomy and equality. The *Henan xian zhi* describes the liberation in these terms:

When Lanzhou was liberated in August 1949, Tashi Tsering and her mother sent Huang Wenyan as a representative to pay their respects to the People's Liberation Army. All the leaders and public figures of the Gannan [southern Gansu] area were present at the reception. They expressed their support for the Communist Party and the People's Liberation Army and received the Commander of the Northwestern Forces, Zhang Zongsun. When the county of Xiahe was liberated, Tashi Tsering personally led the group of Zhasake [Mong.: *jasag*] and the clan leaders from the Henan Mongol Banners to welcome the People's Liberation





Army. She offered the representative of the People's Liberation Army a *khatag* [a greeting scarf] and expressed her support for the Party and hoped that the PLA would soon come to Henan.⁴⁴

We can presume from this remark that Tashi Tsering and her Banner did not resist the entry of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) into Sogpo/Henan. The Peaceful Liberation of Sogpo/Henan, as it is known, took place in August 1952. Even though it is officially described as a celebration with the participation of thousands of people, there appears to have been scattered resistance. The *Henan xian zhi*, in its description of these events, refers to the PLA's success in suppressing what it describes as 'bandits' in the southern part of Sogpo/Henan and it refers also to the support given by Tashi Tsering to the PLA in the fight against espionage.⁴⁵ We can presume that there was in fact some resistance – perhaps quite significant resistance – from among the local population.

Once the PLA had established itself in Sogpo/Henan, the capital of the region was built in 1954 and the construction of buildings in the grassland area was commenced not far from the site where the original large yurt (*Urge*) had served traditionally as the palace of the Sogpo/Henan *qinwang*. The Communists relied at the beginning on the traditional leadership to gain control over the area. Tashi Tsering was therefore appointed head of the 'preparatory committee' of the Mongolian Autonomous Region, followed by another official appointment as the chair of the Henan People's Government. When Sogpo/Henan was formally transformed into a county in 1955, she was elected – a phrase which in effect means appointed – as the *xianzhang* or head of the government of the new administrative unit.⁴⁶ Interestingly, Sogpo/Henan's status as a minority zone was emphasised by the Communists, who proclaimed it to be a Mongolian Autonomous County even though at that time there were hardly any Mongolian speakers there.

In 1955, the local Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CP-PCC) was established, with Tashi Tsering's mother as one of its vice chairmen. As in other minority areas, this body was to include many representatives of the formal political and religious elite. The local CPPCC, a body that is under the control of the United Front (UF) Work Department of the Communist Party, functions as an expression of the so-called united front policy through which the central Chinese authorities work to integrate local traditional leaders into the state and its policies.⁴⁷

Despite Lumantso's new position as a vice-chairman of the CPPCC, she had already withdrawn from any political involvement and had taken religious vows. A relative who visited the Palace of the Henan *qinwang* in Labrang in the 1950s describes her as, in her later years, a pious woman.⁴⁸ In 1956, soon after that visit, Lumantso passed away. To gain merit for the soul of the deceased mother, Tashi Tsering went with her entourage on a pilgrimage to Lhasa in 1957. Her husband, however, did not join the pilgrimage. According to some locals, he





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was asked not to travel with her by the Communists as they feared that Tashi Tsering might not return to Sogpo/Henan if he was with them. This perception of official distrust is largely supported by the official account:

In 1956, Tashi Tsering's mother passed away and a year later she went on a pilgrimage to Lhasa. At a meeting with the Dalai Lama, he said: 'The Party will destroy religion and the people. We have to stand up and fight against it; we have foreign support. It would be best not to return to Qinghai.' Tashi Tsering, upon her arrival in Qinghai, reported this to the government.⁴⁹

In the same year, an incident had taken place which had led the people of Sogpo/Henan to distrust the Communist Party. One early morning in the summer of 1956, the village of Serlong in Sogpo/Henan was attacked by the PLA. There were numerous casualties as a result of this assault, which had taken the inhabitants completely by surprise. Witnesses recall the shooting as having been random, with no apparent care as to who might be among the targets.⁵⁰ The only explanation for this attack was that the PLA had mistakenly believed the people of Serlong to have been responsible for an attack which they had suffered some time earlier on the nearby Gansu-Qinghai border.⁵¹ This incident was the first of a series of clashes between the locals and the PLA which culminated in 1958 in a major uprising.

THE REVOLT

The general situation in the Tibetan and Mongolian areas during that time was becoming more tense. Nationality policy was changing and class background was gaining importance as the major criterion in political practice. When the first grass-roots cell of the Communist Party was established in Sogpo/Henan, it was decided that only those who had a lower class background would be admitted as members. This represented a shift in recruitment policy since, at the beginning, the Party had, in line with its United Front policy, counted mainly on the traditional leaders to provide its support. By the late 1950s, however, having a background as a traditional leader had become a hindrance to any political career. This shift in Party policy was also noticed by Tashi Tsering, who is said to have told a fellow woman leader from Golok: 'Given your family background you are lucky. You will be able to be a leader for a long time. But I do not know how long I will be able to remain as a leader.'⁵² This remark was, in fact, prophetic.

As part of the nation-wide anti-rightist campaign in 1957, leaders who had voiced concerns about nationality issues were demoted or imprisoned. In Sogpo/Henan, a document concerning the anti-rightist campaign was discussed at a meeting in September 1957 and shortly afterwards 22 people and five organisations were declared to be rightists.⁵³





The whole Tibetan area was affected by a chain of revolts in the late 1950s that seem to have resulted from the implementation of democratic reforms in these areas or from the anti-rightist campaign. In Kham, Eastern Tibet, for example, revolts had already been taking place since 1956.⁵⁴ In the neighbouring Tibetan area in the south of Gansu province, a revolt had taken place in early 1958.⁵⁵ In Sogpo/Henan, the uprising was triggered by a meeting to which the heads of the banners were summoned. One of the chieftains fled to Gannan (the Tibetan-populated area in southern Gansu) and organised a large scale uprising with the support of the Tibetans there.⁵⁶ The fact that a chieftain was leading the rebellion changed the scale of the resistance – earlier revolts were mainly localised and had not involved the participation of a large number of people. The *Henan xian zhi* gives this account of one of the revolts which took place in 1958:

...On May 3rd 1958, in some places there was an armed counter-revolutionary revolt (*fan gemin wuzhuang fanluan*). [...] Members of the former political and religious élite misled the masses into staging the revolt. [...] 1,597 families with 7,487 people joined in.⁵⁷ [...] From 1958 to April 1961 the total number of people imprisoned, people sent to labour camps and people arrested for a short time was 1,513. [...] Before the revolt there were 133 religious and nationality United Front figures, but afterwards only 16 were left. Most of these 16 were at least downgraded. Since many people were wrongly arrested, everyone was struck in panic.⁵⁸

The main reasons for the revolt in Sogpo/Henan can be traced back to the impact of events in the neighbouring Tibetan areas, to the incidents during the anti-rightist campaign, and to the occasional clashes that had taken place between the army and the local population. It seems that in the case of Sogpo/Henan, democratic reforms before the revolt had been implemented in a rather moderate way and only after the uprising, radical measures were taken.⁵⁹ Repression and punishment for involvement in the uprising was severe and sometimes people were erroneously imprisoned. This is explicitly admitted in the *Henan xian zhi*. For example, it is reported that the head of Laka monastery, who had also been a vice-chairman of Sogpo/Henan county, was imprisoned in 1958 and died, still in his prison cell, eleven years later.⁶⁰

The period from 1958 to 1961 saw not only the uprising but also the destruction of monasteries in Sogpo/Henan, together with the setting up of communes. Henan county was not the only one to experience this. The dimensions of the devastation affected all Tibetan areas, and the eastern Tibetan regions in particular. This prompted the Panchen Lama to write a critical memorandum to the Chinese government. The document – later described by Mao as ‘a poisoned arrow’ – was to cost him his political career.⁶¹ During the same period we witness in Sogpo/Henan the demise of the United Front policy with the abolition of the local CPPCC and the immigration of ethnic Chinese into the





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area to start cultivation mainly on land confiscated from the monasteries. The unsuccessful attempts at cultivation turned pastureland into wasteland, which can still be seen today.

In 1962 some of the measures taken in 1958 began to be reversed. This relaxation reflected a change in the national political climate which allowed some criticism to be aired of the shortcomings of the Great Leap Forward in the previous three years. Ulanhu, the first Party secretary of Inner Mongolia, managed to discontinue the policy of Chinese immigration and the practice of encouraging the establishment of farms in the Mongolian grasslands. The farms established by the ethnic Chinese in Sogpo/Henan were also closed down, the communes were dissolved and transformed into *xiangs* (townships), and the local CPPCC was re-established.

It seems that Tashi Tsering was not involved directly in the revolt and was therefore spared of any purges. It may also have been the fear of local resentment and of another revolt that had deterred the army from taking direct action against her. However, the revolt and its repression represented also the end of her career as an effective ruler in Sogpo/Henan. In 1960, she was sent to the Central Minorities Institute in Beijing, where she remained for about one year. During that time her daughter was sent to Laka monastery, where she lived with a nun. One son was given to an adoptive family and the other two children were at school in Lanzhou. Soon after her return to the area from Beijing, Tashi Tsering was made a member of the provincial CPPCC in Xining. This step, even though it represented a promotion on paper, in real terms meant that her direct influence over events in Sogpo/Henan had been significantly reduced if not eradicated.

Before moving to Xining, Tashi Tsering married a second time, since her husband Amgon (Gonpo Namgyal) had died in the late 1950s.⁶² Her second husband was her former cook, Sherab, and the marriage was held in Sogpo/Henan in 1962. The small ceremony was attended by relatives and cadres, one of whom, Jamyang Thubten, described the event in these terms:

Sherab was Tashi Tsering's former servant. Tashi Tsering and I were neighbours. One day, she came to me and said: 'I have to talk to you.' And she told me that she wanted to marry Sherab. She then continued, saying that 'he was a servant but we now live in a new society. There is no hierarchy anymore.' I then went to the *xianwei* [the county party committee] and asked for permission. Their reaction was positive, implying that if both of them agreed to the match, there would be no objection to this marriage. The marriage was celebrated in a simple way. The couple first had to bow to Mao Zedong, then to their relatives, and then they both had to declare that it was a love marriage. Tashi Tsering then said: 'Before, I was a queen but now this is a new society. There exists no hierarchy and that is good.' Sherab then continued: 'It is indeed good for a servant to marry a queen!' And everybody laughed.⁶³





After the marriage, the whole family moved to Xining and Tashi Tsering assumed her position as a member of the provincial CPPCC in Xining and was later appointed as a vice-chairman of the Qinghai Woman's Federation.

THE DEATH OF TASHI TSERING

1966 marked the beginning of the Cultural Revolution throughout China. In May of that year, a Cultural Revolution Leading Group had been established with Wang Defu, the then county Party secretary, as the person in charge of Cultural Revolution activities in Sogpo/Henan.⁶⁴



FIGURE 5. Tashi Tsering's family (Tashi Tsering's family archive).





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With the fall of Ulanhu, the highest level minority figure in the Communist Party in China, other minority leaders found themselves targeted as representatives of the 'four olds' or were labelled as 'capitalist roaders'. According to eyewitness accounts, Tashi Tsering was taken back to Sogpo/Henan from the provincial capital, Xining, in October 1966. The circumstances of her death remain mysterious but oral sources confirm that she underwent beatings in Rebkong and finally in Sogpo/Henan which resulted in her death on the day of her arrival in Sogpo/Henan. The *Henan xian zhi*, however, attributes her death to suicide, whereby she swallowed a poisonous button. The only witness to her death was her daughter, Paljor Wangmo, at that time thirteen years of age.

It seems that the death of Tashi Tsering was an internal settling of accounts carried out in the name of revolutionary activities. At that time there were tensions between different social classes as well as tensions between the local population and the soldiers stationed in Sogpo/Henan. We were told that whoever was in charge of the situation had sent cadres who were sympathetic to her precisely on that day to other places with orders to carry out revolutionary activities. The result was that the colleagues who were still in power were not in a position to help her. In fact the situation had never completely been settled after the suppression of the revolt and the vague accounts we received concerning the precise responsibility for her death indicated that the main people responsible were among the army and the local activists. This concurs with the remark in the *Henan xian zhi* that the first Red Guards from outside the area arrived in Sogpo/Henan only in November 1966, a month after her death is believed to have occurred.⁶⁵ We are left with the question as to whether her death was a random casualty of the violence of the Cultural Revolution or a planned event.

After her death, the remaining members of the family lived with nomads in Takmar in the northern part of Sogpo/Henan county for several years. At that time, it was Sherab, her second husband, who took care of the children. Because of their family background, the children of Tashi Tsering experienced considerable hardship and were refused permission to enter any school. Tashi Tsering and her whole family were rehabilitated, in her case posthumously, in 1979 at a memorial ceremony in Xining. Her relics were enshrined in Labrang, the monastery where the remains of all the other *qinwangs* are kept. Both in the official record and in the memory of the local community, Tashi Tsering is credited with having sustained and revived Mongolian identity in Sogpo/Henan. She even became an ethnic hero: her biography is included among those of the major historic figures of the area and she is presented as one of a series of symbols of Mongolness in the local records. In fact, although she was a Mongolian ruler and represented the Mongolness of her place already in the Guomindang era, she never spoke Mongolian and she was, in fact, half-Tibetan. When she was in power, the education policy of the local government promoted the teaching of the Tibetan and the Chinese languages, and it was only in the 1980s that Mongolian became an option in education. We might conclude, therefore, that,



beyond what she had achieved as a sensible and moderate ruler in extremely difficult times, she was constructed posthumously as an ethnic hero as part of China's 'nationalities' project' that came to the fore in the 1980s.

CONCLUSION

Tashi Tsering's life story illustrates the different roles played by a woman who was made to cross from a traditional to a modern society. Even though she was, in her personal affiliations, something of a modernist, she seems to be identified primarily in retrospect as a member of an ethnic group and thus as a participant in the shared values and ideals of that group. At the same time, it is clear that she experienced the difficulties of being a woman in a predominantly masculine political arena. By taking on the role of a leader of that community, she not only emphasised her gender, but also her ethnicity and her identity as distinct from other groups, and in doing so she became at the same time the symbol and carrier of that nationality. She tried to represent her nationality *vis-à-vis* the emerging Chinese state, but both the Guomindang and the Communist state used her for their own purposes and in their own terms, either as a representative of her ethnicity, or as a woman. In this sense, the titles, formal and informal, that were heaped upon her from time to time, ranging from that of 'Queen Elizabeth' to the leader of the provincial women's federation, served essentially similar functions. When the Communists gained power in China and Sogpo/Henan was 'liberated', she had no choice but to adapt to the changing social order. Her role therefore came to include that of participating in the process of modern state construction, in her case in the effort to transform Sogpo/Henan from a small Mongolian kingdom into a 'minority autonomous county' in the Communist era. Even though she seemed to have crossed successfully the boundary between the traditional and the modern, in the final analysis she was not allowed to function as other than as an emblem of her past. It was in this capacity, being perceived as an embodiment of 'the old', that she appears to have been killed.

Tashi Tsering's daughter, Paljor Wangmo, continued to play the part of a leading woman in the modern Chinese state, and was appointed to various political positions ranging from a vice-leader of Sogpo/Henan county to membership of the national CPPCC. Among the four children of Tashi Tsering, it was she who achieved the highest positions and who seems to be the one who most closely embodies her mother's legacy. This role, of emblematically representing her nationality, thus appears to have been gendered – in the logic of the United Front it appears to have been her, Paljor Wangmo, who should be given preference to that role. Unlike her brothers, she was not a member of the Communist Party, an affiliation which is conventionally seen as cutting across nationality lines. She is seen in the current era of ethnic revival as the political heir of her mother and, like her, remains today a much respected and appreciated leader





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among the local community in Sogpo/Henan. Her real power is limited; it is as though her gender is seen by the state as better representing the form of power or powerlessness that it inscribes on the contemporary political role of minority leaders. Even though Paljor Wangmo, as the only one to have held a national-level position, has been given the highest political position among these three women in her family, she has, in real terms, the least influence on events in her home area. Neither she nor her mother Tashi Tsering were able to regain much of the actual power exercised by her grandmother Lumantso in Sogpo/Henan some sixty years before. Despite their quite exceptional efforts at and even enthusiasm for compromise with the modern, the Chinese, and the nation-state, both became pawns, sometimes praised and sometimes brutalised, in the history of the forced transformation of a traditional local authority into emblematised ethnicity in this Mongol-Tibetan area of the modern Chinese state.

NOTES

¹ The title *qinwang* is usually translated as ‘prince of the first rank’ and is the highest ranking title a noble could receive from the Qing emperor. By the same token, Tashi Tsering, being a woman, should be referred to by using the English term ‘princess’. However, the term ‘princess’ has a variety of associations that are not pertinent to her role and which evoke marriage politics. In this article therefore we have either used the untranslated Chinese term *qinwang*, or we have used the term ‘queen’ to better reflect her own power as a local ruler. This corresponds with the more generic Chinese term *wang* that was also used to address her and her predecessors, along with various Tibetan terms. The personal names of the rulers are given in Tibetan, as Tibetan is the language currently spoken in Sogpo/Henan. We give, however, the Mongolian names when these apply to the 17th and 18th century ancestry.

² Henan *xian* is translated into Tibetan as Malho dzong (rMa lho rdzong); a *xian* is the official Chinese term for a county.

³ Sometimes this area is referred to in Tibetan as ‘Arig Sogpo’ or ‘Sogpo Arig’ – a term which refers to both ethnic components of the community: the Mongols, who reckon their descent from the Hoshuud army of Güüshri Khan, and the Tibetans who claim to form an ethnic sub-group known as the Arig which originated at the time of the Tibetan empire. The Arig are said to have entered into an alliance with the Mongols and to have become later subjects of the Mongol ruler of Sogpo. See The CPPCC of Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, *rMa lho rdzong rig gnas lo rgyus dpyad yig* [Records of History and Culture of Malho County], (Henan/Malho, 1999), vol. 2, 25.

⁴ According to Tsejao, a relative of Tashi Tsering and Lobsang, a contemporary of Tashi Tsering, the name of Tashi Tsering’s mother was Dekyi Drolma, sometimes referred to as Delo. Since we do not have any further evidence of this, we refer to Tashi Tsering’s mother as Lumantso, as it is given in the *Henan xian zhi* and in the *rMa lho rdzong gi rig gnas lo rgyus dpyad yig*.

⁵ A few powerful political women do exist in Mongolian and Tibetan records. One of them is Queen Tsering Tashi, the wife of Lhajang Khan, for which see Barnett in this volume.





⁶This was a reward for the support he had provided for the enthronement of the seventh Dalai Lama and his support during the Mongol rebellion led by Lobsangdanzan (Lobsang Tendzin) in 1723. See L. Petech *Selected Papers on Asian History*, (Rome, 1988), 226–227 and U. Bulag *The Mongols at China's Edge*, (New York, 2002), 32.

⁷dBal mang pandita dkon mchog rgyal mtshan, *Gya Bod Hor Sog gyi lo rgyus nyung ngur brjod pa byis pa 'jug p'i 'bab stegs bzhungs so* [A Brief History of China, Mongolia and Tibet], (Xining, 1990), 104.

⁸Konchog Choephel (dKon mchog chos 'phel), 'rMa lho'i sog yul gyi lo rgyus steng gi don chen gsal ba'i me long' in The CPPCC of Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, *Rma lho rdzong rig gnas lo rgyus dpyad yig* [Records of History and Culture of Malho County], (Henan/Malho, 1996), vol. 1, 90–159.

⁹*Mes po'i shal lung*. Manuscript.

¹⁰ The monastery of Labrang Tashikyil was founded in 1709 by the first *qinwang*, Chagaandanjin (Tsewang Tenzin). His wife, Namgyal Drolma, invited the first Jamyang Zhepa from Drepung in Lhasa to become the head lama of the monastery. The rulers of Henan from then onwards were the patrons of Labrang monastery and their relics can be found enshrined in a *stupa* at the monastery.

¹¹ Mongolian leaders such as Gungsangnorbu (1871–1930), the *Jasag* prince of the Kharachin Right Banner, who initiated modernisation in his banner; and Prince Demchogdongrob (1902–1966) from the Sunid Right Banner, who led the Inner Mongolian Autonomy Movement in the early 1930s. There was also a pan-Mongolian movement attempt by the Buriyad Mongols at the end of the first world war. For more information see Sechin Jagchid, *The Last Mongol Prince: The Life and Times of Demchogdongub, 1902–1966*, (Washington, 1999) or Sechin Jagchid, *Essays in Mongolian Studies* (Provo, 1988).

¹² The CPPCC of Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, *Rma lho rdzong gi rig gnas lo rgyus dpyad yig*, [Records of History and Culture of Malho County], (Henan/Malho, 1996), vol. 1, 147.

¹³ Apparently, on a small scale, the political structure of 'Sogpo' reflected that of the Oirad, with the ruler governing together with a powerful assembly of representatives of the ruled areas (cf. Uyunbilig in this volume).

¹⁴ Interview with Lobsang, July 2002.

¹⁵ The CPPCC of Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, *Rma lho rdzong gi rig gnas lo rgyus dpyad yig*, [Records of History and Culture of Malho County], (Henan/Malho, 1996), vol. 1, 154.

¹⁶ The northwestern part of China was ruled by military commanders since at least 1862 when Ma Zhan'ao was a commander in Hezhou, nowadays known as Linxia in Gansu province. Lipman writes that at least fourteen Muslims with the family names Ma led armies in Gansu from the late Qing onwards. Since the Anti-Qing revolution was carried out by mutinous soldiers, they later represented real authority in a time when disintegration was visible everywhere in China. Most of the provinces were controlled by military governors who tried to seek control of a territory. It was in this political context that the 'warlords' emerged to become the authorities within a territory. See Jonathan Lipman, 'Ethnicity and Politics in Republican China' in *Modern China* (July 1984), vol. 10, Nr 3, 290–294; Jack Gray, *Rebellions and Revolutions. China From the 1800s to the 1980s*. (Oxford, 1990), 170–193.

¹⁷ Jonathan Lipman, 'Ethnicity and Politics in Republican China' in *Modern China* (July 1984), vol. 10, Nr 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 304.





¹⁹ Paul Kocot Nietupski, *Labrang. A Tibetan Buddhist Monastery at The Crossroads of Four Civilisations*, (Itaca, 1999), 82.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

²¹ Jonathan Lipman, 'Ethnicity and Politics in Republican China' in *Modern China* (July 1984), vol. 10, Nr 3, 298.

²² Chen Zhongyi and Zhou Ta (eds), *Labuleng si yu Huang shi jiazuo*, (Gansu, 1995), 352.

²³ Records Committee of Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, *Henan xian zhi*, (Gansu, 1996), 1021.

²⁴ The CPPCC of Qinghai Province, *Qinghai wenshi ziliao*, 3, (Xining, 1985), 73.

²⁵ The CPPCC of Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, *rMa lho rdzong gi rig gnas lo rgyus dpyad yig*, [Records of History and Culture of Malho County], (Henan/Malho, 1996), vol 1, 153. The title of *tsenpo* evokes the title of the ancient Tibetan kings. The combination *wang tsenpo* recalls that of *wang khan*, attributed to Chinggis Khan, and seems to express the hybrid nature of this position and its political power, both centred in the community yet also dependent on China.

²⁶ Interview July 2001 and August 2002.

²⁷ Chen Zhongyi and Zhou Ta (eds), *Labuleng si yu Huang shi jiazuo*, (Gansu, 1995), 352.

²⁸ Interview with Jamyang Thubten and Paljor Wangmo, August 2001.

²⁹ Interview, August 2001.

³⁰ Interview, August 2002 (name withheld).

³¹ There are accounts of an earlier case in which the *qinwang* had only one daughter and eventually a male kinsman was appointed as heir, as an 'adopted son'.

³² There is still a lot of gossip concerning the relationship between Lumantso and Ma Bufang, from talk of an alleged affair to a peculiar story about how she achieved the succession of Tashi Tsering to the throne: according to one account the council of the banner-leaders had agreed on Samten, son of the chieftain of Doksom, as the most suitable candidate for the succession. When the choice of the candidate was announced, Lumantso was displeased. She thereupon asked Ma Bufang to support her daughter as the heir. Ma Bufang is then reported to have had the ears and the nose of Samten cut off, an act of intimidation which would also have inflicted on him a mark of humiliation that disqualified him from being the next ruler. It is difficult to ascertain whether these voices reflect any real events and circumstances, or whether they just express some tensions raised by the appointment of the female ruler.

³³ Interview with Tsering Dhondup, August 2001.

³⁴ The CPPCC of Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, *rMa lho rdzong gi rig gnas lo rgyus dpyad yig*, [Records of History and Culture of Malho County], (Henan/Malho, 1996), vol 1, 155.

³⁵ Chen Zhongyi and Zhou Ta (eds), *Labuleng si yu Huang shi jiazuo*, (Gansu, 1995), 352–353.

³⁶ Committee for the Compilation of the Local Records of Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, *Henan xian zhi*, (Gansu, 1996), 1021.

³⁷ Bulag U., *The Mongols at China's Edge*, (New York, 2002), 39 ff.; Jagchid 1988:299ff.

³⁸ The CPPCC of Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, *rMa lho rdzong gi rig gnas lo rgyus dpyad yig*, [Records of History and Culture of Malho County], (Henan/Malho, 1996), vol 1, 156.





³⁹Committee for the Compilation of the Local Records of Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, *Henan xian zhi*, (Gansu, 1996), 943.

⁴⁰Personal archive, Jia Zhen.

⁴¹Deng Lichun (ed.), *Dangdai Qinghai jianshi*, (Beijing, 1996), 18.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 18–19.

⁴³This confirms a later account given by Lobsang in August 2002 that there were early Communists working underground in Henan. For example, according to Lobsang, a certain Arig Jolo from Henan acted as a go-between for the marriage between Tashi Tsering and Aba Alo's son. At that time Tashi Tsering was already privately engaged to Washu but the death of Kunga Paljor gave a new relevance to the marriage. This prompted Arig Jolo to promote the alliance with Aba Alo who had already shown some interest in the Communists' activities in Labrang. It was suggested that this Arig Jolo was an undercover Communist wanting to break the alliance between Ma Bufang and the Mongols and the Tibetans. The marriage between Tashi Tsering and Aba Alo's son would have strengthened the Communist sympathisers. Interview, August 2002.

⁴⁴Committee for the Compilation of the Local Records of Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, *Henan xian zhi*, (Gansu, 1996), 943.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 943.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 944.

⁴⁷The United Front was a political organ of the Communist Party which was and is in charge of nationality and religious issues. Traditional leaders who showed sympathy towards the new regime were recruited into various governmental and other bodies. Despite gaining a position of relatively high status, these traditional leaders, however, had very little decision-making power. The CPPCC represented one of the bodies into which traditional leaders were most frequently recruited. This organisation has a consultative function and exists throughout China. It is especially important in the running of minority areas. See J. Dreyer 1972.

⁴⁸Interview with Tsejao, July 2002.

⁴⁹Committee for the Compilation of the Local Records of Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, *Henan xian zhi*, (Gansu, 1996), 944.

⁵⁰Interview with Namgyal Drolma, July 2002.

⁵¹Some sources claim that the attackers were from neighbouring Lequ in Gansu province and were trying to get hold of modern weaponry and horses.

⁵²Interview with an eyewitness to that event (name withheld), Henan, July 2001.

⁵³Committee for the Compilation of the Local Records of Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, *Henan xian zhi*, (Gansu, 1996), 30.

⁵⁴Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows. A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947*, (London, 1999), 136ff.

⁵⁵Committee for the Compilation of the Annals of Xiahe, *Xiahe xianzhi*, (Lanzhou, 1999), 89.

⁵⁶Interview with Lobsang, August 2002.

⁵⁷At that time the entire population of Henan county consisted of a little over 12,000 (i.e. 12,283). Committee for the Compilation of the Local Records of Henan Mongolian Autonomous County (eds), 1996, *Henan xian zhi*, Lanzhou: Gansu minzu chubanshe, 193.

⁵⁸Committee for the Compilation of the Local Records of Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, *Henan xian zhi*, (Gansu, 1996), 731, 710–711.

⁵⁹According to a local Chinese cadre from Henan, reforms and the promotion of produc-





tion were implemented in a moderate way in Henan in contrast to other areas where these created disastrous consequences. Interview with Jia Zhen, July 2001.

⁶⁰Committee for the Compilation of the Local Records of Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, *Henan xian zhi*, (Gansu, 1996), 880.

⁶¹See Panchen Lama, 1997.

⁶²Here again, the sources indicate different dates and causes for the death of Amgon. Some oral accounts say that he died in 1959 in a car accident. Aba Alo writes in his biography that Amgon died in 1957 of illness. (Chen Zhongyi and Zhou Ta (eds), *Labuleng si yu Huang shi jiazu*, (Gansu, 1995), 353.

⁶³Interview with Jamyang Thubten, July 2001.

⁶⁴Committee for the Compilation of the Local Records of Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, *Henan xian zhi*, (Gansu, 1996), 38.

⁶⁵Committee for the Compilation of the Local Records of Henan Mongolian Autonomous County, *Henan xian zhi*, (Gansu, 1996), 944.

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