

## CHAPTER 13

### The Fall of the Panchen Lama

THE OPEN CRITICISM, denunciation, and struggle against the Panchen Lama took place during the fourth session of the PCART People's Assembly in 1964, when he was accused of having "opposed the Party, opposed socialism, and opposed the people's government." After that, he was taken to China and made to suffer untold misery for the next 10 years. The reason was that after the Chinese imposed full control over Tibet in 1959 and subjected the Tibetans to unthinkable and inexpressible oppression unlike anything else they had suffered in their long history, Panchen Rinpoché had personally traveled throughout the areas inhabited by Tibetans. While investigating the causes for this heavy-handed treatment, he had been told about the appalling sufferings inflicted on the common people and, in an effort to ameliorate this dreadful state of affairs, had compiled a report consisting of 70,000 Chinese characters divided into eight sections concerning the situation in the country and suggestions for how it could be better handled in the future, which was submitted to the central government. Although that report had been submitted in 1962, the Tibetan people did not come to know about it until two years later when Panchen Rinpoché was openly denounced.

That Panchen Rinpoché would have mounted such a criticism of the Chinese government on behalf of Tibetans was something that the people of Ü province, and Lhasa in particular, had not even imagined. This was because during the time of the [previous] ninth Panchen Chöki Nyima, the functionaries of the Tashi-lhunpo Labrang and the Ganden Po-trang government had taken different views about their respective responsibilities, and some of the chief Labrang officials suddenly decided to take the ninth Panchen away from his Tashi-lhunpo monastery in Tsang and travel

to China via Mongolia, accepting the support of the Guomindang government against the Tibetan Ganden Po-trang government. When the Red Chinese took over the country, that Tashi-lhunpo group identified itself with them and, using the tenth Panchen reincarnation, Chöki Gyeltsen, then only nine years old, as their figurehead, they egged the Communists on to invade Tibet, incited them, and offered their full assistance—or that is what Ü people said at the time. Before the “liberation” of China as a whole, the aim of Mao Zedong and the top Communist leadership was to “liberate” the areas still under Nationalist control, but they had no fixed plan for the invasion of Tibet. It was commonly claimed that when Mao Zedong went on a congratulatory visit to Russia after the establishment of Red China, Stalin strongly encouraged the idea of immediately sending troops into Tibet, which he saw as a strategic territory, and on the strength of that and the appeals by the leaders of the “Panchen Nangma-gang” group, the Chinese launched their invasion.

Of course one cannot put all the blame for the Chinese invasion on the Tashi-lhunpo leaders, but such talk was not unfounded nonsense either. For example, in his *Old Man's Tale*, Khémé Dzasak, one of the signatories of the “Seventeen-Point Agreement on the peaceful liberation of Tibet,” wrote that during the negotiations the Chinese government ordered the Tashi-lhunpo and Ganden Po-trang delegates to sit together and resolve their historical differences. In the course of the discussion, the Chinese government representative Zhang Guohua became infuriated by an argument put forward by one of the Tibetan government representatives, the chief secretary Lhawutara, and responded quite directly and unabashedly that the issue of the Tashi-lhunpo Labrang or Panchen group was the main reason Chinese troops had to be sent into Tibet. And in the keynote speech by Nga-pö (Ngawang Jikmé) to the second session of the fifth TAR People's Congress on July 31, 1989, he said that although in the prelude to the signing of the Seventeen-Point Agreement the discussion was solely between the central government and the Tibetan government, the Chinese had suddenly announced a new requirement, talks to solve the historical dispute between Ganden Po-trang and Tashi-lhunpo. One of the most important points Nga-pö made in that speech was that while it was possible that these discussions had been initiated by the central government, they could well have been initiated by the [Tashi-lhunpo] Nangma-gang leaders. Panchen Rinpoché was only nine years old at the time, which clearly shows [that it was] the Nangma-gang leaders inciting the Chinese government in that period.

In any case, after Chinese troops had forcibly entered Tibet, Panchen Rinpoché and his entourage reached Tibet via Xining with a Chinese military escort in 1952. While the Tibetan government made lavish preparations for his reception in the Dalai Lama's apartments in the Lhasa Tsuklakhang temple, the Tashi-lhunpo Labrang officials, emboldened by Chinese support, not only had their say in the matter but also, as this was to be their first-ever meeting, insisted that Panchen Rinpoché should not prostrate himself before His Holiness and that the two lamas' thrones should be of equal height, ignoring the accepted conventions of religious polity. The Chinese government representative in Tibet, Zhang Jinwu, also interfered in the arrangement of this meeting.

Then Panchen Rinpoché resided [at his monastery] in Shika-tsé up until the events of 1959, and in those years the Labrang officials used their position, riding on the shoulders of the Chinese, to increase their standing in relation to the Ganden Po-trang government in whatever ways they could, and the chief district administrations (*rDzong khag*) in Tsang under Shika-tsé's authority were given special treatment. Not only that, there were many incidents of the monastic and lay followers nurtured by the Labrang's leading figure, Dzasak Tanak Tétongpa Ché Jikmé, bullying and threatening subjects of the [Lhasa] government in the Shika-tsé area and even attacking them, so that the people lived in a state of apprehension. One of my prison mates called Losang was from Shika-tsé and had been working for some time in administering the Pa-ri trade tax (*Phag ri sho khral*) when it happened that one of the Tashi-lhunpo Labrang groups was slightly affected by that tax. One morning while he was in Shika-tsé, some youths recruited by Dzasak Tétongpa and so-called disciplinarians from Tashi-lhunpo suddenly barged into his house and led him away, without giving any reason, to the marketplace, where they gave him 100 lashes of the whip in public, then announced that this was the punishment for defaulting on a grain loan. That is just an example, but one frequently heard such stories, for the struggle between the Tibetan government and the [Tashi-lhunpo] Labrang gave rise to mutual antagonism among the common people and instances of bloodshed in many parts of Tsang, as I heard from fellow prisoners from Tsang.

In 1959, when the whole of Tibet rose up against the Chinese, the Tashi-lhunpo Labrang recruited people from the three main districts under its control, Lha-tsé, Ngamring, and Puntsok-ling, for a paramilitary organization entirely armed by the Chinese military, known as the "Panchen's bodyguard," which was one of the chief instruments for the suppression

of the people during the uprising. In reward for having taken this stand in complete opposition to the Tibetan people, when the holdings of monasteries and monastic and noble estates all over the country were obliterated during the Democratic Reform campaign following the quelling of the 1959 uprising, Tashi-lhunpo and the Labrang officials retained their authority, received compensation for their monastic and private estates, and were appointed to positions in the Chinese administration. Moreover, they offered Panchen Rinpoché the position of acting chairman of the PCART in place of His Holiness, and built him a new residence called Dorjé Po-trang at Shuktri Lingka in Lhasa. Because of the Panchen's stand, people in Ü, and Lhasa especially, lost faith in him somewhat, and some openly criticized and resented him as a lama in name only, who was in the pocket of the Chinese. So the fact that Panchen Rinpoché had actually been single-mindedly looking after the interests of the Tibetan people with such great concern and without regard for his own position amazed people once they came to know about it, and those who had criticized him regretted what they had said, confessed their mistake with joined palms, and gained faith in him.

Before people found out about the 70,000 Character Petition, Panchen Rinpoché used to give weekly audiences at his Dorjé Po-trang residence in the Shuktri Lingka, which were attended only by old folks who stopped by on their circumambulation of the Lingkor circuit, and occasionally he gave a longevity empowerment in the reception hall. At such times, Panchen Rinpoché repeatedly joined his palms in prayer while uttering the name of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in devoted recollection, and when Lhasa people heard about this, they became more convinced that the earlier opposition to the government by his Labrang and support for the Chinese was only the doing of the Labrang officials, while the Panchen himself had unequivocal faith and devotion [in His Holiness], so more people started coming to hear his teachings and attend his audiences.

A little while later we heard that Panchen Rinpoché had gone on a tour of Kongpo, but in fact, in order to quash the 70,000 Character Petition, the Chinese had taken him to Kongpo with the intention of getting him to repudiate it. But Rinpoché had the welfare of his people at heart and bravely refused, so that finally, at the fourth PCART assembly in 1964, he was openly denounced, criticized, and subjected to struggle, and then taken off to China. In order to prepare public opinion for the denunciation of the Panchen Rinpoché, they set up an exhibition on the "crimes of the anti-Party Panchen clique" at Trungchi Lingka, the site of the present Tibet University, and each neighborhood committee in turn took people there to see it. I was

in Lhasa at the time and was taken to see it, and an activist member of my subcommittee appointed to check on my reaction stayed right next to me throughout the tour, which was very trying. The exhibition featured rifles, cannon, a jeep, radio transmitters, and a “Vajra army” flag, which were presented as evidence that the “Panchen clique” was staging a rebellion. Some of the famous images from holy places in Ü district, including the Reteng Jowo, the Ra-tsak Dakini, and the Shédrak Acarya [Guru Padma], which the Panchen had collected and looked after, were also in the exhibition, and people jostled to get a closer look at them. The exhibition guides delivered a very harsh diatribe about how Panchen Rinpoché had been involved in violent opposition to the Party, had stolen national sacred artifacts for himself, and behaved despicably.

After the tour, we had to give an account of our feelings about it in the evening meetings of our subcommittees. The Chinese hoped that after seeing the exhibition, the people would vigorously oppose, denounce, and defame Panchen Rinpoché, but it didn’t happen like that. One amusing instance was a fat Khampa trader from the Lhasa meat market who had not been obliged to see the exhibition since he was of poor [class] origin and chronically ill, and normally stayed home. However, the prospect of seeing the sacred images persuaded him to go, and when required to give his reaction at the evening meeting, he said, “Today’s tour was really a great opportunity! Previously, to get to see these holy images you had to spend a lot of physical effort, precious time, and money, but this morning, due to Panchen Rinpoché’s great kindness, we got to see them all there at once!” There were separate meetings for us “class enemies” to determine whether we had any involvement in the Panchen issue, and daily meetings in each Reform Through Labor group where we had to give our views, which made our misery worse.