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When Christianity and Lamaism Met: The Changing Fortunes of Early Western Missionaries in Tibet

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The study of Western missionary activity in Tibet and the interactions between Christianity and Tibetan Buddhism (otherwise known as Lamaism) is as yet a relatively ignored topic in Chinese-Western cultural history. For decades, Chinese histories on this topic have interpreted modern and early modern era Western missionary activities in the Tibetan region as further evidence of the West's 'imperialist designs' on Chinese territory. From a Sino-centric perspective, the eventual 'failure' of Western missionaries to establish a solid religious base in Tibet and nearby regions serves as a clear demonstration of the Tibetan people's 'anti-imperialist' and 'patriotic' proclivities vis-à-vis foreign encroachments. Other works attribute the meteoric and temporary nature of the Christian phenomenon in Lamaist Tibet to the incompatibility of the two religions in doctrinal, ritual, and intellectual terms.¹

Indeed, in past centuries Western missionaries time and again took the perilous and time-consuming journey to the forbidden kingdom at the roof of the world, only to be frustrated by the poor number of native converts, to be expelled from the area, or even to be killed or to die. But at different stages of Tibetan history secular rulers and religious leaders such as the Dalai Lama have been eager to protect Western missionaries and their tasks of preaching Christian beliefs to the local Tibetans.

What motivated the Tibetan high authorities to support missionary activities in their Lamaist realms during our period? And what were the key factors that lead to the eventual withdrawal of Western missionaries from Tibet? Further, what are the implications of the early encounter between Christianity and Lamaism in terms of a macro-historical perspective on Tibetan history? This paper seeks to answer such questions first by tracing the history of Western missionary activities in Tibet from the 1620s through the eve of the collapse of the Qing dynasty, and then by contextualizing the above questions in the broader historical, religious, and socio-political contexts of early modern and modern Tibetan society.

The Jesuits and Their Missionary Enterprises in the Guge Kingdom

The first Western missionary known to have reached Lhasa was the Jesuit Father Antonio de Andrade. By 1601 King Philip III of Spain and the Pope in Rome were both feverish about exploring Cathay (China) and reclaiming for the Church the peoples "lying between India and Cathay." Their grandiose scheme did not materialize until the 1620s, when Antonio de Andrade, then Portuguese Superior of the Jesuit Mogul mission at Goa on the west coast of the Indian subcontinent, decided to launch an adventure to China, traveling overland by Kashmir and Tibet. In early 1624, accompanied by Fratello Manuel Marques, a remarkable lay brother who subsequently figured prominently in the exploration of western Tibet, Andrade set out from the Mogul imperial court at Agra in north India on a reconnaissance tour of Tibet. By the autumn of 1624, after an arduous journey across the Himalayan crest, Andrade and Marques reached Tsaparang on the Upper Sutlej River. Tsaparang was then the seat of Guge, a historic Lamaist kingdom whose territory covered approximately the present-day Gartok district of west Tibet.²

The first encounter between the Western missionaries and the Tibetans seemed an auspicious one. The Tibetans greeted Andrade and Marques with surprising friendliness. During the course of their meeting, the king and queen of Guge consented to daily religious lessons and gratefully

provided a particularly good environment for propagating the faith. So well did Andrade make his case that before long, three additional priests were named to join him in establishing a permanent mission at Tsaparang.³

By August 1625 Andrade, Marques, and Father Gonzales de Sousa arrived in Tsaparang again as an advance contingent to open the mission. They began to construct a permanent church on Easter Day of the very next year for which the king of Guge himself had donated the necessary funds and had officiated at the cornerstone ceremony. Before the new church was completed, the remaining priests arrived: Fathers João de Oliveira, Alano dos Anjos and Francisco Godinho. A branch mission was established soon afterwards in Rudok, 300 miles north of Tsaparang, run by the newly arrived priests. According to the Jesuits' own account, by 1627 there were about a hundred local converts in the Guge kingdom, including the queen, the crown prince, and some other important royal members. Even the king himself had pledged to Andrade that he might be baptized in the near future.⁴ It became a marvel that the Jesuits were able to establish a missionary foothold in the Gartok district, a place that had a long tradition of following the Bon religion as well as Lamaism.

Andrade may have looked upon Tsaparang as a gate to many other Lamaist kingdoms in the Tibetan ethnic area. From Guge the Jesuits probed both northward to Rudok and westward to Ladakh. Jesuit correspondence also referred to mission activity as far north as Kashgar, in Chinese Turkestan. Yet perhaps the most significant initiative taken by Andrade and his fellows was that which led in 1626 to the establishment of a Jesuit outpost at Shigatse, then the seat of the Tsang kingdom. The betrothal of a daughter of the king of Tsang with the crown prince of Guge may have offered Andrade, who was maintaining cordial friendship with the Guge royals, a possibility to further his missionary task in Shigatse.⁵ In the summer of 1626 Andrade reported to Goa that he had received a royal decree and a letter of invitation from Tsang's monarch. In early 1628, at Andrade's request and recommendation, Fathers Estevão Cacella and João Cabral undertook the journey from Goa to Tsang. Cacella and Cabral made their strenuous journey from north India across the Himalayas to Shigatse, where they were warmly received by Karma Tenkyong, then ruler of Tsang. When meeting with his unusual Jesuit guests, the friendly Karma Tenkyong gave permission to the friars to propagate Christianity within his Lamaist domain and generously provided the priests with handsome stipends so that they could sustain their daily necessities and carry on their work in Shigatse. The supportive king of Tsang even approved Cacella's bold suggestion that a new route be developed connecting Shigatse and north India with a view to facilitating the possible flourishing of missionary activities.⁶

Christianity and Tibetan Politics

Why were the rulers of these Lamaist kingdoms so enthusiastic about introducing the Christian belief into their realms? What prompted their compliance with and courtesy towards the Jesuits? There may well have been strong political motivation behind the support of missionary enterprises by the Tibetan monarchs and their courts. At the time Andrade and Marques had reached Tsaparang, the king of Guge was plagued with increasingly unruly and obstinate monastic communities in his domain. The whole situation worsened when this monastic upheaval was clandestinely encouraged by the king's own family members. By the early 1620s the Yellow Hat reformists, known more formally as the Gelugpa sect of Lamaism, had the upper hand not only in Guge, but also widely in the whole of Tibet. With the growing numbers of Yellow Hat adherents throughout Guge, the monastics were able to extract considerable resources from their followers. For instance, as Chief Lama the king's brother had long antagonized the king by taking the best of Tsaparang's young men for the Gelugpa monasteries, thereby depriving the army of their services. Predictably, the king perceived such activities as a potential threat to his secular rulership. The Chief Lama's rapidly increasing income further suggested that the Gelugpa sector was likely to become one of the wealthiest groups within the kingdom.⁷

The king of Guge eagerly accepted Christianity as an offsetting religious influence to dilute the thriving Gelugpa and to counterbalance his potential rivals and consolidate his position. On various occasions the king openly championed the cause of Andrade. He not only allowed the Jesuits to preach at the court, but further proclaimed that privileges and preferences be showered upon the missionaries. The king meanwhile had wasted no time in defaming the Lamaist teachings and showing his growing resentment of the Yellow Hat lamas; he even tacitly allowed the Jesuits to attack Lamaism by conducting public debates between the two sides.⁸ The priests' open criticism of Lamaism, made possible by their escalating power in the court, was in part responsible for the fall from favor of the king's brother and the monastic authorities he represented. A political storm was brewing in Guge that threatened its very existence.

By the late 1620s the king's brother had become so fiercely jealous of Andrade's increasing reputation that he initiated a secret plot to expel Christian influence from the kingdom. While the Jesuits found gratification in the king's help, including financial subsidization, and were moved by visible testimony of royal sympathy, they failed to sense in time the growing public resentment whipped up by the disgruntled lamas. It was inevitable that the blatant royal favor shown to the alien mission would inflame the monastic communities and lead ultimately to a clash with the Jesuits. In 1630 much of the strength and momentum of the Tsaparang mission was lost when Andrade left to take up new duties as Provincial at Goa. He had been the mission's driving force and continuing inspiration. Without him Jesuit influence could hardly be sustained. So when the king fell ill later in that year, the dissident Yellow Hat lamas, led by the king's brother, saw their chance. With help and secret encouragement from the king of neighboring Ladakh, the seething clergy and warrior monks rose against the throne.⁹

The result of the 1630 turmoil in Guge was a disaster not only to the king and his family, but also to the Jesuits. The king, the queen, and other high royals were imprisoned and were then 'escorted' to Leh and never heard of again. A prince from the court of Ladakh became the de facto ruler of Guge, which indicated that Guge was no longer an independent kingdom and was henceforth under the suzerainty of Ladakh. The Christian converts of Guge also suffered at the hands of the revengeful lamas. Many were carried off by force to Ladakh as slaves. The church and properties at Tsaparang and Rudok were sacked, and five Jesuits in residence at the time of the assault became virtual prisoners of the intruding Ladakhis.

unable to restore their previous prestige in Guge, particularly after the influential Andrade died in 1634, followed by the deaths of two other priests en route to their new post in Tsaparang. A last effort to reestablish the mission in Guge collapsed in 1640, when a party of three new priests was attacked as it entered Tibet before reaching Tsaparang and was forced to retreat to India.¹⁰ In retrospect, but for the vagaries of local politics, Guge might have become a Christian state. As it turned out, no remaining trace of Christianity could be found in western Tibet when the next Western travelers passed through many years later. The brave efforts made by Andrade and his Jesuit fellows seemed to have dissolved into thin air.

In the Tsang capital of Shigatse Jesuit activity unfolded in a similar manner, with the arrival of the Western missionaries playing into local religious and political intrigues. At the turn of the seventeenth century, religious wars had created serious strains on Tibetan unity. Although by the 1620s the reformist Gelugpa Sect had the upper hand in most of the Tibetan region, the old Karmapa Sect still dominated in some parts of southern Tibet, such as Shigatse and the Tsang area.¹¹ When Fathers Cacella and Cabral reached Shigatse on January 20, 1628, tension was rising between the Karmapa and the Gelugpa. In order to consolidate their status vis-à-vis the omnipresent Gelugpa monastic communities, both King Karma Tenkyong of Tsang and his Karmapa patrons thought it would serve their interests to introduce the Jesuits and their Christian beliefs to counteract their powerful rivals in most parts of Tibet. From the very start of Cacella and Cabral's period in Shigatse, Karma Tenkyong had displayed enthusiasm about the Jesuit activities.

However, in spite of the favorable atmosphere for the Jesuits, no solid missionary base was ever established in Shigatse. Historical sources are too fragmented to allow a definite conclusion to be drawn as to why the Jesuits eventually left the Tsang kingdom. Nevertheless, according to correspondence between Cacella and his superiors at Goa, we do know that the 1630 revolt in Guge and the resultant collapse of the Jesuit missionary footings in that kingdom forced the Jesuits to seriously reconsider the feasibility of building a stable Christian settlement in this Lamaist realm. Their final analysis was obviously not optimistic.¹² In spite of Karma Tenkyong's zealous anticipation of Cacella and Cabral staying in Tsang a bit longer to create a possible permanent Shigatse mission, the two priests were extremely reluctant about the king's proposal. In 1632 they were finally recalled by Goa, and the short-lived mission in Shigatse was abandoned.

The Capuchins in a Relatively Unified Tibetan Kingdom

The commencement of the eighteenth century witnessed more direct communication between Tibet and Western missionaries than has existed either before or since. In 1708 four Capuchin friars, having first founded a mission station near Kathmandu, Nepal, boldly made their way via Gyantse to Lhasa, where they were well received by Lhazang Khan, who was ruling over a relatively unified Tibet. By claiming themselves to be 'medical doctors' who were coming to help the Tibetans voluntarily, the Capuchins sought the ruler's favor. For reasons still unknown to us, Lhazang Khan eventually decided to allow the friars to stay in Lhasa. Yet the Capuchins' clandestine missionary enterprise in the forbidden kingdom did not go smoothly. After three years of voluntary work in Lhasa without financial support either from Rome or the Tibetan court, the Capuchins were reduced almost to starvation, and, unable to sustain themselves any longer, they were forced to temporarily abandon their mission in 1711.¹³

The mission to Tibet was revived, however, after some effort was made in Rome by the adventurous and ambitious Father Domenico da Fano. In 1715, equipped with sufficient stipends, twelve priests were reallocated to the Tibetan branch mission, four of whom were to be stationed at Lhasa, and the rest in Nepal and north India. These outposts of Roman Catholic missionaries survived until the 1740s despite the hostility of the Tibetan lamas and the superstitions of the Tibetan people, who were always ready to attribute disasters to the devices of the missionaries.

Yet it was under the protection of both the Tibetan secular rulers and the great religious prelates, such as the Seventh Dalai Lama, that the Capuchins were able to overtly launch their missionary tasks. On arrival in Lhasa Domenico da Fano, together with his fellow Capuchins, delivered to Lhazang Khan a letter from Pope Clement XI, in which the Vatican authorities expressed their gratitude to the king of Tibet if the latter would generously allow the Holy Faith to be propagated in the Lamaist kingdom. Presumably in order to counterbalance the hostile theocratic influence of the Gelugpa Sect as well as to exploit the mathematical talent of the Westerners, Lhazang Khan immediately consented to the friars' request to stay, permitting the Capuchins to preach to the Tibetan ruling nobles and high officials. The Tibetan ruler issued permissive decrees in favor of the Capuchins, stamped on yellow satin with the confirmatory seal of the Celestial Emperor. He also generously allowed the Capuchins to establish their own missionary settlement in the capital of Tibet, a move that seemed against the Tibetan tradition of prohibiting Westerners to purchase property in the sacred land.¹⁴

The Capuchin activities in Lhasa were soon overshadowed by the Mongolian invasion of Tibet in 1717. As the year began the Mongols on the northern steppe conspired with the Tibetan Yellow Hat lamas with a view to overthrowing Lhazang Khan's secular leadership. In the face of the Mongolian intrusion, the unprepared king of Tibet was only halfheartedly supported by his Tibetan auxiliaries. Although Lhazang Khan did appeal to the distant Qing court in Peking, his Manchu overlords were unable to respond immediately, or to send troops to come to his rescue. Lhazang Khan was killed later in 1717 as the Mongols sacked Lhasa. During this tumultuous period the Capuchins in Tibet held on precariously. At one point the brethren even wrote to the king of neighboring Sikkim in the Himalayas, inquiring if they might take refuge there.¹⁵

However, matters seemed to take a favorable turn after Qing troops came and pacified Tibet in 1720-21. The Manchus reorganized the Tibetan secular government, confirming a prestigious Tibetan noble called Kanchenas as the new ruler of the Lamaist kingdom. The Manchus also escorted the Seventh Dalai Lama from Kokonor back to Lhasa and established him as a purely religious leader. Both Kanchenas and the Dalai Lama were impressed by the Capuchins' survival, who by their efforts to do good and their medical skills had convinced those in authority in Lhasa that their labors were beneficial and worthy of being protected. The Capuchin Fathers were allowed to continue preaching Christianity to

propagated, they nevertheless generally supported the missionary enterprise in Tibet. For example, Kanchenas ordered the Capuchins to translate the Christian teaching into the Tibetan language so that more and more lamas would be able to study it. In 1725 Kanchenas officially granted permission to the Capuchins to erect their own mission house and chapel in Lhasa and even gave a site for the buildings. Although the Gelugpa monks wasted no time stirring up their followers to oppose Kanchenas' decision, they had very limited success. The friendly attitude of the king of Tibet towards Christianity remained steadfast, and in response to the Lamaist antagonism towards the Capuchins he issued a proclamation making it a penal offence to injure the missionaries or damage their property. When the small church and mission house were eventually completed in the fall of 1726, it was alleged that the new establishment was even visited by some "grand lamas of Lhasa," who exclaimed that "Your God is in truth a great god."^{[16](#)}

In 1727 Tibet encountered yet another crisis that shook the unity of the kingdom. The Manchus generally mistrusted Tibetan lamas and monks due to their previous conspiracy with the Mongols. So, after 1720 and under Qing patronage, Tibetan administrative officials became predominantly secular. By the late 1720s, however, Tibetan secular officials were embroiled in personal feuds and divided by political and religious factions. Kanchenas repeatedly pointed out the benefit of a unified Tibetan administration but failed to reconcile the various factions. The internal disputes and power struggles eventually came to a head in the summer of 1727 when an anti-Manchu faction murdered Kanchenas and took over control of Lhasa. The rival group, led by a Gartok Tibetan noble named Polhanas, immediately struck back. By an impressive feat of political and logistical organization, Polhanas first took control of the Tsang area, then, in July 1728 Polhanas's forces confronted Lhasa and slaughtered the rebels. The Manchu forces and officials immediately confirmed Polhanas' status as new ruler of Tibet after they returned to Lhasa in late 1728.^{[17](#)}

Polhanas, like his predecessor Kanchenas, took a liberal stance vis-à-vis Tibet's religious issues. He promised to compensate the Capuchins for their losses during the civil war, ordering the protection of their mission house and church in Lhasa. Polhanas himself also frequented the church and talked with the priests, whose main task at this stage was to translate various Western works into Tibetan. Yet before long, financial troubles haunted the missionaries once more, and by 1729 only two friars were left in Tibet. Polhanas had offered to provide the Capuchins with sufficient funds to procure necessities, and suggested that the Fathers, who had a considerable medical practice among the people, should charge fees for their advice and medicine. Yet both these offers seemed to have been declined by the missionaries on the grounds that it was against their principles to be in any way supported by non-Christians. By 1733 financial problems drove the Capuchins out of Lhasa, and the mission in Tibet was once again obliged to close.^{[18](#)}

For the seven years between 1733 and 1740 the Lhasa mission was deserted and no Capuchin monks remained in Tibet or Nepal. But representations made in Rome by Father Orazio della Penna, who since 1725 had been Prefect of the Lhasa Mission and had stayed there until 1733, eventually had an effect, and the Pope himself became interested in the revival of the mission. Equipped with sufficient financial resources, Della Penna and nine Capuchin brethren started for the East in 1738, bearing with them presents from the Pope of Rome to Polhanas and the Dalai Lama. In early 1741 the Capuchins reached Lhasa and took up their old quarters, which appeared to them to have been well preserved. Almost all the chief Lhasa officials and nobles, including Polhanas, the Seventh Dalai Lama's family members, and the Qing Resident (recently posted after the 1728 coup), welcomed them. The assurance from the highest echelons of the Tibetan authorities that they would endeavor to protect the missionary activities, along with an increased number of local Tibetan converts, greatly encouraged the returning friars. In late 1741 Father Gioachino da San Anatolia, who shared the honor of the longest service in Tibet with Orazio della Penna, was dispatched back to Europe to inform the Vatican authorities of the safe arrival of his band of missionaries in Lhasa and to bring friendly replies to the Pope's letter from the Dalai Lama and the king of Tibet.^{[19](#)}

However, it would appear that about the time that Gioachino reached Rome, persecution of the Capuchins broke out in Lhasa. The jealous Tibetan monastic community viewed the open patronage of the missionaries by Polhanas and other highly placed secular officials with increasingly intolerable disfavor. The tension increased until one day in May 1742 when several hundred furious Gelugpa lamas invaded the royal palace and upbraided Polhanas for his partiality. The Tibetan ruler, terrified of meeting the same fate as his unfortunate predecessors, immediately declared that the Capuchin priests had fallen from his favor. The frightened king of Tibet also forbade the missionaries from preaching Christianity in the country, except to outside traders. The Tibetan government further ordered that local converts be hunted down, placed in Chinese wooden collars (cangue), and flogged. Tremendously frustrated by this turn of events, the Capuchin fathers began to realize that the time had arrived for them to abandon their work. A momentary compromise was reached between the Capuchins and the Lhasa authorities when Polhanas reluctantly allowed the priests to preach only on condition that they should declare Tibetan Buddhism to abound in goodness and perfection. The friars lingered on in Lhasa for another two and a half years until April 1745 when the valiant Father Orazio della Penna finally acknowledged himself beaten, and resolved to abandon the mission.^{[20](#)}

The Shifting Social and Political Environment in Tibet

The 1750s saw considerable change in Tibet's political and social environment. When Polhanas died in 1747, his son Gyurmey Namgyal succeeded him as the new ruler. Yet unlike his father, who favored the policy of maintaining close connections with the Qing court, Gyurmey Namgyal took an anti-Manchu stance and secretly conspired with the Mongols in order to end Qing influence in his kingdom. In 1750 the Qing Resident, convinced that Gyurmey Namgyal was intent upon rebellion, decided to take steps to eliminate him. He lured the young king to his residence and murdered him with his own hands. The Manchu Resident was killed soon afterwards by Gyurmey Namgyal's followers, and Lhasa was once again thrown into disorder. On hearing of the rebellion, the Qing court at Peking immediately sent troops. After quelling the rebels in Lhasa, the Manchus once again reorganized the Tibetan government and this time endeavored to abolish hereditary rule by secular aristocracy. The Seventh Dalai Lama, whose influence hitherto was largely religious, was now invested with both spiritual and temporal authority. In the meantime, the power of the Qing Residents in Tibet was greatly increased and they supervised the Tibetan administration more closely than

the Dalai Lama was empowered as the supreme figure in both political and religious terms, the Gelugpa Sect that the Dalai Lama's lineage represented was also elevated to a unique and unchallengeable status among the Tibetan people. Previously, lay aristocrats had been able to control substantial human and social resources, but now a substantial number of Buddhist monasteries and their incarnated lamas also began to possess manorial estates, arable land, and 'bound' labor forces. The appearance of this dual politico-religious system in Tibet led to local monasteries serving concurrently as powerful political arbitrators who exercised judicial powers and exacted taxes from followers.²² Each Gelugpa monastery gradually became a self-sufficient unit, with hundreds of thousands of monks, presided over by an incarnated lama. Great monasteries controlled enormous estates comprised of manors and pastures and worked by serfs, with the surrounding regions inhabited by nomads. The lamas had their own courts and prisons, and often organized their own militias and possessed thousands of guns and horses.²³

A close 'patron-priest' relationship developed when the Gelugpa monastic sector colluded with the native chieftain system. Great monasteries usually dispatched high-ranking lamas to participate in the political institutions administered by local chieftains and Tibetan tribal headmen, whose status was conferred by the Qing authorities and who enjoyed a high degree of autonomy at the local level. Likewise, native chieftains and tribal leaders frequently sent their close relatives, usually one of their sons, to the monasteries to become monks so that they might have an influence over monastic affairs. Moreover, by becoming the patrons of monasteries, native chieftains and tribal leaders would distribute their assets, money and other financial resources to the monasteries, in exchange for the latter's theocratic support in consolidating political domination in their areas of control.²⁴

From the mid-eighteenth century on political, financial, and social resources were concentrated in the hands of the anti-Christian Gelugpa monastic sector and its political patrons. In this climate Western missionaries inevitably found it extremely difficult to establish a footing in Tibet. Whereas their predecessor brethren were able to maintain cordial relations with the Tibetan rulers and to propagate their faith, albeit with limited achievements, subsequent Western missionaries in the latter half of the nineteenth century encountered greater difficulties during the course of their work. These later missionaries gradually became aware that their properties and lives were exposed to great danger.

The Fate of Western Missionaries in Tibet

Two fathers of the Paris Foreign Mission Society named Krich and Bourry were the first Western priests known to have been murdered in Tibet. In 1854 they traveled from Tachienlu, the strategic city on the Tibetan-Sichuan border where the Mission Society was headquartered, to Lhasa, with a view to restoring the old missionary settlement that had been suspended since Father Orazio della Penna's era a century earlier. Their grandiose plan was presumably inspired and encouraged by the Qing court's recent decree allowing Western missionaries to purchase lands and construct churches in Chinese provinces. Yet long before reaching Lhasa, they were allegedly murdered en route by tribal peoples in eastern Tibet. This incident was followed by similar reports in the next two decades of at least ten other lower-ranking priests of the Paris Foreign Mission Society being killed or injured during their journeys to other missionary outposts in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands.²⁵

In 1881 Father Brioux, then head of the Paris Foreign Mission Society in Batang in eastern Tibet, was reported to have been murdered on his way to Lhasa. This time the Qing court was determined to make proper investigations in order to prevent the misfortune from becoming a diplomatic controversy between China and France. Officials from Peking were soon dispatched to Sichuan and Tibet to investigate the event. In the first instance these officials believed what the local Tibetan leaders and chieftains had claimed about Father Brioux, namely that he, like unfortunates before him, was murdered accidentally by 'unruly' and 'uncivilized' tribal inhabitants for the purpose of stealing their money and other valuable property. After a detailed survey, however, Qing officials were surprised to discover that these murder cases were in fact covertly supported and even orchestrated by local lamaseries and native chieftains. Obviously feeling threatened by the considerable increase in the number of new Christian converts in eastern Tibet,²⁶ as well as by the imperial decree allowing the missionaries to openly purchase and possess land, the lamaistic monastic communities and their political patrons felt the need to take drastic measures to secure their religious, financial, and political interests. Furious at the involvement of lamaseries and native chieftains in murdering the French missionary, Qing officials severely punished the accused monks and native chieftains in the Batang district. For the purpose of maintaining peace and order in the region a Qing garrison was immediately stationed on the route connecting Sichuan and Tibet proper. Meanwhile, the Manchu high officials in Peking also reassured Western powers that they were determined to protect missionary activities in southwest China, hoping in this way to acquire European understanding concerning the Brioux case.

The Qing government's overtures to the Westerners, along with its highhanded policy towards religious issues in southwest China, had caused bitter resentment among Tibetan monastic communities and native chieftains. Their hatred was exacerbated when, at the end of 1904, the new Manchu Assistant Resident to Tibet, Feng Quan, arrived at Batang on his way to the stronghold of Chamdo. One of the new Assistant Resident's urgent tasks was to further the Qing court's effective control over Tibet and the adjacent southwest Chinese borderlands, and his policy was to gradually abolish the hereditary native-chieftain system and to curtail the influence of the Gelugpa Sect. Feng Quan prohibited Tibetan monasteries from accepting new lama recruits for a period of twenty years. He also ordered the protection of Western missionaries and their churches, whose position had been augmented as a result of their recent success in obtaining part of the land originally belonging to local Gelugpa monasteries. The local French priests welcomed Feng Quan's project, viewing the Qing reform in southwest China as an opportunity for them to extend their religious influence further westward into Tibet proper.²⁷

Indignation over Feng Quan and the Christian presence escalated to a climax in March 1905, when thousands of the Batang lamas revolted, killing Feng, his entourage, local Manchu and Han Chinese officials, and the local French Catholic priests. The revolt soon spread to other cities in eastern Tibet, such as Chamdo, Litang and Nyarong, and at one point almost spilled over into neighboring Sichuan Province. The missionary stations and churches in these areas were burned and destroyed by the angry Gelugpa monks and local chieftains. Dozens of local Westerners, including at least four priests, were killed or fatally wounded. The scale of the rebellion was so tremendous that only when panicked Qing

What are the implications of the encounter between Christianity and Lamaism in terms of broader historical, political, and social contexts? This research suggests that the history of Western missionaries in Tibet can be basically divided into two main stages, with the 1750s as a watershed. Before the mid-eighteenth century, religious and political sectors in Tibet basically functioned separately. Religious dignitaries such as the Chief Lama of the powerful Gelugpa Sect in the Guge kingdom, or the Dalai Lama and his monastery in Tibet proper, did not dominate political and military affairs. But from time to time secular rulers and lay officials in Lamaist realms had to take precautions against monastic influences threatening their positions. Set against this backdrop, when the Jesuits and the Capuchins arrived, secular rulers tended to seize the opportunity and utilize Christianity as leverage to counterbalance the strong Lamaist influence as well as the increasingly powerful Gelugpa Sect and its monks. As a result of these local political intrigues in Tibet, the Western missionaries were inadvertently given a chance to spread their faith in the otherwise 'forbidden land' whose rulers even allowed their guests to purchase lands and build missions in their realms. Any failures or successes on the part of the missionaries in Tibet cannot be divorced from the internal power struggles in Tibet at that time.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, the political, societal, and religious structures in Tibet began to fundamentally transform. With direct Qing involvement resulting from both the Mongolian invasion and internal instability, hereditary secular ruling lineages in Tibet were gradually abolished, and after the civil war in the early 1750s the Dalai Lama was invested with both religious and secular authority by the Manchus. Now the Dalai Lama, and the Gelugpa Sect he represented, achieved a unique and unchallengeable status among the Tibetans. Social, financial, and land resources were gathered and concentrated in their hands as the result of the newly formed politico-religious system. This turn of events had huge impacts upon subsequent missionary enterprises in Tibet. To the dominant Gelugpa Sect, the conversion of the Tibetans to Christianity implied abandoning faith in the Dalai Lama and numerous other incarnated lamas who were also political leaders and chiefs. The development of the manorial system, operated and backed by the monastic communities, came to mean that any involvement by Christian church authorities in Tibetan society would be resisted because as more Tibetans were converted to Christianity, monastic income would decrease. Father Brieux's case indicates that the murders of Western missionaries in the latter half of the nineteenth century may often have been orchestrated by local lamaseries and their political patrons. Lamas and native chieftains felt so threatened by the Westerners that they lashed out against and even killed Qing high officials in the region that attempted to facilitate the missionary presence.

When reviewing the encounters between Christianity and Lamaism we should not overlook the fact that both the Jesuits and the Capuchins had momentarily succeeded in building their mission bases in Tibet and had maintained cordial relationships with Tibetan secular rulers. While the temporary triumph of the Christians' presence in a Lamaist realm is interesting to note, perhaps more significant are the reasons for such a phenomenon. Clearly, the 'standard' Chinese historical narratives that interpret the killing of foreign priests by the Tibetan lamas from the latter half of the nineteenth century onward as clear evidence of the Tibetan people's 'anti-imperialist' and patriotic behavior are inaccurate understandings of the genuine motivations of the people involved. It was neither 'anti-imperialism' nor 'patriotism' that led the Tibetans to expel the Western missionaries, but rather the fact that Tibetan religious and political figures were desperate to prevent any possible intrusion into their local interests and privileges by Christian authorities.

ENDNOTES

1. See, for example, Zeng Wenqiong, "Qingdai Woguo Xinang Zangqu di Fanyangjiao Douzheng ji qi Tedian", in *Xizang Yanjiu* (Lhasa), 1985, No. 4, pp. 47-56; Fan Jianchang, "Xizang Jidujiao shi", *Xizang Yanjiu*, 1990, No. 1, pp. 87-100. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
2. Graham Sanderg, *The Exploration of Tibet: History and Particulars* (Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1973), pp. 23-26; Thomas Holdich, *Tibet, The Mysterious* (London: Alston Rivers Ltd., 1906), p. 70. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
3. Sir Edward Maclagan, *The Jesuits and The Great Mogul* (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1932), pp. 344-345. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
4. Lettera del P. Alano Dos Anjos al Provinciale di Goa, 10 Novembre 1627, quoted from Wu Kunming, *Zaoqi Chuanjiaoshi jin Zang Huodongshi* (Beijing: Zhongguo Zangxue chubanshe, 1992), p. 163. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
5. Filippo de Filippi ed., *An Account of Tibet, the Travels of Ippolito Desideri of Pistoia, S.J., 1712-1727* (London: George Routledge & Sons Ltd., 1937), p. 7. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
6. Extensively using Italian and Portuguese archival materials, Wu's work gives a detailed account of Cacella's activities in Tsang. See *Zaoqi Chuanjiaoshi jin Zang Huodongshi*, esp. chapter 5. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
7. Sven Hedin, *Trans-Himalaya, Discoveries and Adventures in Tibet* (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd., 1913), Vol. III, pp. 304-309. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
8. Lettera del P. Antonio de Andrade. Giov de Oliveira. Alano Dos Anjos al Provinciale di Goa, 29 Agosto, 1627, quoted from Wu, *Zaoqi Chuanjiaoshi jin Zang Huodongshi*, p. 196; Maclagan, *The Jesuits and The Great Mogul*, pp. 347-348. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
9. Cornelius Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia, 1603-1721* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1924), pp. 80-85. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
10. Maclagan, *The Jesuits and The Great Mogul*, pp. 349-352; Filippo de Filippi ed., *An Account of Tibet*, pp. 13-17. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)

1988, 1989, pp. 82-83. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)

13. Holdich, *Tibet, The Mysterious*, p. 76. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
14. Sanderg, *The Exploration of Tibet*, pp. 38-39; Warren W. Smith, Jr., *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), pp. 122-123. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
15. Fulgentius Vannini, *The Bell of Lhasa* (Agra, India: Capuchin Ashram, 1976), pp. 197-200. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
16. Sanderg, *The Exploration of Tibet*, pp. 40-46; Vannini, *The Bell of Lhasa*, pp. 229-230. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
17. Luciano Petech, *China and Tibet in the Early XVIIIth Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), pp. 105-110. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
18. Wu, *Zaoqi Chuanjiaoshi jin Zang Huodongshi*, pp. 435-455; Vannini, *The Bell of Lhasa*, pp. 245-265. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
19. Sanderg, *The Exploration of Tibet*, pp. 96-98; Wu, *Zaoqi Chuanjiaoshi jin Zang Huodongshi*, pp. 463-478. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
20. Holdich, *Tibet, The Mysterious*, pp. 84-86; Vannini, *The Bell of Lhasa*, pp. 405-408. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
21. Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 140-152. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
22. Dorje Tsaidam ed., *Xizang Jingji Jianshi* (Beijing: Zhongguo Zangxue chubanshe, 1995), pp. 19-38. On the Tibetan manorial system, see also Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 3-6. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
23. Tashi Yongdzin, "Qiantan Kangqu Dege Tusi yu Gaitu Guiliu", *Zangxue Yanjiu Luncong*, Vol. 7 (1995), pp. 180-193. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
24. Kanze Zangzu Zizhizhou Gaikuang (Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe, 1986), pp. 86-89. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
25. Yang Fuseng, *Zhongguo Jidujiao shi* (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Publishing Ltd., 1968), p. 315; Sun Zihe, *Xizang Shishi yu Renwu* (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Publishing Ltd., 1995), p. 63. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
26. Taking Yanjing (Caka'lho) on the Yunnan-Tibetan border for example, in the 1860s there were already nearly 400 Tibetan converts, thanks to the energetic French Mission Society in southwest China. See Liu Jun, "Kangqu Waiguo Jiaohui Lanxi", *Xizang Yanjiu*, 1991, No. 1, p. 87. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
27. Eric Teichman, *Travels of a Consular Officer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), p. 20; Elliot Sperling, "The Chinese Venture in Kham, 1904-11, and the Role of Chao Er-feng", *Tibet Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1976), p. 13. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)
28. S. A. M. Adshead, *Province and Politics in Late Imperial China: Viceregal Government in Szechuan, 1898-1911* (London: Curzon Press, 1984), pp. 68-99; Bao Luo and Ze Yong, "Yanjing Tianzhujiao Shilue", *Xizang Yanjiu*, 2000, No. 3, pp. 42-45. [\[RETURN TO TEXT\]](#)