

Placing “Qinghai Studies” in the Field of China and Inner Asia

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In this scholarly note, Chia Ning argues for the creation of a field of Qinghai 青海 studies to recognize the unique historical and cultural contributions of present-day Qinghai Province, China, a multiethnic region in the Chinese hinterlands that has been influenced by Tibetan, Mongol, Han Chinese, and Muslim populations over the centuries.

The Importance of Qinghai in the History of China & Inner Asia

From my examination of the formation of present-day Qinghai 青海 during the transition between the Ming 明 (1368–1644) and Qing 清 (1636/44–1912) dynasties, a visible and valid new field emerges in the broad study of China and Inner Asia: *Qinghai studies*. Connecting the heartland of Tibet (Xizang 西藏) in the south and southwest, China Proper in the east, Mongolia (through present-day Gansu 甘肃) in the north and northeast, and Chinese Central Asia (present-day Xinjiang 新疆) in the northwest (see fig. 1), Qinghai became a distinct administrative unit beginning with the reign of the Yongzheng 雍正 Emperor (r. 1723–35). Manchuria was also involved in this connecting land area, in the sense that the Manchu court of the Qing moved into Qinghai as the dynastic authority. Today, the history of this connecting land has remained unspecified in the study of China and Inner Asia.

“Tibetan studies” and “Mongol studies,” each with enough active scholars worldwide, have long been recognized as established academic fields. In the United States, the historical study of Chinese Central Asia (Xinjiang) has also developed within the past two decades; today, a body of scholarship worthy of being called “Xinjiang studies” exists. Since the late 1980s, several important articles and books have been published on the Manchu people and their history; thus, “Manchu studies” has likewise emerged. When approaching Chinese history, therefore, the four major components of the historical Inner Asian “frontiers”—Manchuria, Mongolia, Xinjiang,



FIGURE 1 Political map of the People's Republic of China, with Qinghai 青海 and surrounding administrative divisions identified. (Dashed lines indicate contested borders.) Unlabeled public domain image from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:China_Qinghai.svg.

and Tibet—have become regionally specified studies. Together with the long-existing Chinese studies that focus on historical China Proper, all of the major regions of China and Inner Asia seem to be covered.

Omitting Qinghai from these studies, however, seems unwise. Many decisive events in the history of China and Inner Asia would lose their origin if the Qinghai influence were ignored. Eleven such occurrences are described below.

- If Tsong Khapa (1357–1419), a native of Huangzhong in Qinghai, had not developed the *Dge lugs pa* (Yellow Hat) School of Tibetan Buddhism, the later institution of the Dalai Lama would not have had such a rich religious foundation. In addition, the Tar Temple, built in Huangzhong in 1577, would not function as one of the six most influential *Dge lugs pa* centers in the Tibetan Buddhist world.
- If the third Dalai Lama (1543–88) had not traveled through Qinghai on his way to meet the Tümed Altan Khan (1508–82),

who titled him “Dalai” in 1577, the third Dalai would not have been able to leave a great religious legacy to the Qinghai region. Moreover, the title of “Dalai Lama” in the whole of the Tibetan Buddhist world would hardly exist, unless it had arisen from another event at another time.

- If the Chahar Ligdan Khan (1592–1634) had not taken with him “the Eight White Yurts, or shrine of Chinggis Khan, to Köke-nuur” (the Mongolian name for Qinghai), he possibly would have made himself less—rather than more—“unpopular” with other Mongol groups (Atwood 2004, 335).
- If Ligdan Khan, accordingly, had not failed in his battles against the rising Manchus—and had not died in 1634, he possibly would have been able to enhance his ruling capacity over the Mongols and establish a competent power in Qinghai to confront the Manchus.
- If the Khoshud Güüshi Khan (r. 1642–55) had not moved into Qinghai in 1636 and destroyed the Khalka Tsogtu Khan—the enemy of the *Dge lugs pa* School—at the Battle of Olango (Bloody Hill) in the Qinghai Lake region in spring 1637, the *Dge lugs pa* School’s influence over the Tibetan Buddhist world would undoubtedly be different today.
- If the fifth Dalai Lama (1617–82) had not proclaimed Güüshi the “king” (in Mongolian, *khan*) of Tibet on April 13, 1642 (Atwood 2004, 211), or granted Güüshi the “title and seal of Tenzin Choskyi Gyalpo (Religious-king and Holder of the Buddhist Faith)” (Shakabpa 1984, 105)—and if Güüshi (with his Khoshuds ruling over Qinghai) had not venerated the power of the fifth Dalai Lama, then the Tibetan–Khoshud relationship and the Khoshud influence over Qinghai would have developed quite differently.
- If the Güüshi Khan and the fifth Dalai Lama had not decided on the matter of sending an envoy, Sechen Chogyel, to visit Qing Taizong Hong Taiji in Mukden in 1637, both the Güüshi–Manchu relationship and the Manchu–Tibetan relationship would have evolved differently.
- If the Kangxi 康熙 court (1662–1722) had not entitiled the Qinghai Mongols (the descendents of Güüshi) after vanquishing the Zünghar leader Galdan in 1697—and if they had not transferred the seventh Dalai Lama from the Tar Temple to Lhasa in 1720 after defeating the Zünghar invasion of Tibet that began in 1717, the history of the Dalai Lama and the power balance between the Qing and the Zünghar would undoubtedly have been different.

- If the Yongzheng court had not pacified the 1723–24 rebellion of the Qinghai Mongols led by Lobzang Danjin, the political map of the Qing after the Yongzheng reign would have been affected.
- If the Grand Minister Resident of Xining 西宁 (an official position that originated in 1725) had not drawn the territorial boundaries of present-day Qinghai in 1731, the region commonly known today as Qinghai would possibly not even exist.
- If the Jangkya line of reincarnations at the Youning Temple (built in 1604, northeast of Xining in the present-day Huzhu Tu 互助土 Autonomous County of Qinghai) had not assisted the Kangxi and the Qianlong 乾隆 (1736–95) emperors in Mongolian affairs, the Manchu–Mongol relationship would have taken a different turn.

There is no doubt that without these Qinghai “happenings,” the history of China and Inner Asia would have to be rewritten. Accordingly, a focused regional history known as Qinghai studies would create a home base for investigation into these decisive events and would encourage a focused examination of Qinghai influence.

Emigration, Immigration & Perspectives on the Sociohistory of Qinghai

The key historical players in Qinghai came from a variety of ethnic groups: the Amdopas (people of Amdo) who lived there generation after generation in their *tusi* system; the Tibetan Buddhist clerics from the religious network and hierarchy centered in the heartland of Tibet; the immigrant settlers and powers (Mongols, Muslims, Han Chinese groups, and the Qing power, for example); and the emigrant dignitaries (such as the Jangkya Khutuktu to Inner Mongolia and the Qing to Beijing). Following the footsteps of these key players in and out of Qinghai, one can discover that they were often influential enough to have a vital impact on the surrounding regions and even sway the various local histories. Local powers even initiated some important changes at the level of the central government: One convincing example is the appearance of the new *Lifanyuan* 理藩院 branch—that of the Grand Minister Resident of Xining.

In several respects, Qinghai has a unique history with its own heritage. In terms of ethno-cultural natures, geo-political settings, frontier or non-frontier categories, social organizations, leadership types, and governing systems, Qinghai obtained its status as a land where several civilizations intertwined. Qinghai was a part of the historical Amdo, “one of the three major ethno-linguistic regions of Tibetan cultural geography” (Yeh 2003, 499), and was one of “Tibet’s outer provinces” (Gruschke 2001). Here lived the Amdopas, the descendants of Tibetan soldiers from Ü-tsang, who came to fight the forces of Tang 唐 China (618–907) and intermarried with the

local Qiang people. According to Ming and Qing records, they had inseparable religious ties with the heartland of Tibet and were identified as *fan* 番 or *fanzi* 番子.

The history of Qinghai was a specific part of the Mongol history as well. The "Monguors" (or the later named Tu people), under their Chagaan (or Tsaghan Nom-un) Khan, had already lived in Qinghai since the Yuan 元 dynasty (1271–1368). When the Shunzhi 順治 court (1644–61) became involved in Qinghai by following the Ming pattern of the court–local correlation through entitlements to the Tibetan Buddhist leaders, the Qinghai Amdopas experienced stormy relationships with repeated waves of Mongol groups, the Ordos, the Tümeds, and the Khoshuds, who eventually came to dominate the Amdopas. After Güüshi Khan, the Mongols in Qinghai evolved into eighteen branches. From the official Qing point of view, after the Yongzheng court established the office of the Grand Minister Resident of Xining, Qinghai was no longer a Mongol-occupied region but a part of the Qing Empire.

The increasing Muslim and Han Chinese population further augmented the character of Qinghai in terms of its ethnic, social, cultural, economic, and political diversity during the Ming–Qing transition. Together, the ethno-cultural affinity with the heartland of Tibet, the political entanglement with Mongol groups, the relationship with the Qing Manchu court through the Grand Minister's administration, and the daily social and economic contact with the Muslim and the Han population, all helped shape the exceptional history of Qinghai.

Cartography & Administrative Identity in Qinghai

None of the four major Inner Asian societies of the Qing had a major political center comparable to Xining, the political center of Qinghai, in association with the Chinese *junxian* 郡縣 (province–country) system. Starting from Jincheng Jun in the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) and Xining Jun in the Wei 魏 dynasty (420–549), the Yuan dynasty placed Xining Zhou within Gansu Province; during the Ming dynasty, Xining Wei was placed within Shaanxi 陝西 Province. These Chinese *junxian* decisions, weak and unstable, demonstrate the desire of the imperial authorities to integrate the region of Qinghai into China Proper. Carrying on this tradition, the Kangxi court shifted Xining from Shaanxi province to the newly reformulated Gansu province in 1667. The further promotion of Xining as a *fu* 府 (prefecture) came in 1738. This association with the Chinese system, even if not always effective, draws another line between Qinghai and the other Inner Asian regions.

The notable uniqueness of Qinghai during the Qing dynasty was the administration of the Grand Minister Resident of Xining under *Lifanyuan*

supervision by the central government. In 1723, the Yongzheng emperor sent Changshou, vice minister of the Board of War, to manage Xining, which at that time was the most important battleground between Lubzang-Danzin and the Qing troops. After Changshou was captured while delivering Yongzheng's edict to Lubzang-Danzin, the court quickly decided to set up a permanent office in Xining with a stabilized connection to the central government. Thus the first Grand Minister was appointed to Danai in 1725. With his official responsibilities crossing both ethnic and administrative lines, he was unusually given authority over the Qinghai Mongols in the banner system, the Qinghai Amdopas in their traditional *tusi* system, and Xining Prefecture with a Chinese-style administration. The distinct local-central connection here was linked through dual routines. The Grand Minister-Lifanyuan-emperor routine was a non-Chinese practice, and the Xining Prefecture-Gansu Province-central government-emperor routine followed Chinese tradition. The "atypical" local management and local-central connections defined Qinghai as an administrative region similar neither to China Proper nor to Inner Asia.

The shaping of the Qinghai territory was closely related to the resettling of the Amdopas. When the Grand Minister divided the territory of the Qinghai Mongols from that of Xining Prefecture in 1724, the Amdopas were set free from the Khoshud Mongols. Further administrative demarcations of the Amdopas came in 1728 and 1731-32. The local officials from the heartland of Tibet, Sichuan 四川, and Shaan-Gan 陝甘 were called to meet four officials sent by Danai. The seventy-nine Amdo tribes between the heartland of Tibet and Xining were placed under two administrative authorities: thirty-nine were assigned to the Grand Minister Resident of Tibet in Lhasa, and forty were assigned to the Grand Minister Resident of Xining. The numerous other tribes were placed in the surrounding Sichuan, Yunnan 云南, and Gansu provinces, which became the permanent arrangement of provinces. From then on, the Qing court identified the Amdo *tusi* by following these administrative categories, such as *tusi* at the border of Sichuan, *tusi* under the Grand Minister Resident of Xining, and *tusi* under the Grand Minister Resident of Tibet. After development of the *junxian* system at the Qinghai-Gansu border, the Amdopas there were referred to as *tusi* of Xining, *tusi* of Taozhou, *fanzi* of Xunhua, and *fanzi* of Guide.

The Qing court's appointment of the Grand Minister Resident of Xining in 1724 after the Grand Minister Resident of Tibet (in 1709) administratively separated Qinghai from the heartland of Tibet. Through these geographical and administrative demarcations, the Yongzheng court parted the Amdopas from the Mongols. And by the administrative divisions among the Amdopas, the Qing parted the Amdo Tibetans in Qinghai from those in Sichuan, Yunnan, and Gansu. The official enforcement of these administrative divisions, however, did not change the basic identity of the Amdopas. Their

tribal social structure, *tusi* leadership, and Tibetan Buddhist religious clergy continued throughout the remainder of the Qing dynasty.

"Qinghai": The Name & Future of Qinghai Studies

The finalization of the regional name of "Qinghai" had much to do with the Yongzheng Emperor's use of it in his instructions to the *Lifanyuan*. By the Qianlong reign, the name was adopted in all the *Lifanyuan* and other official documents in the Chinese language. All previous names—including the Mongolian name, *Kökenuur*; the Tibetan name, *Cuiwanbu* (transliterated from Chinese sources); and the Chinese name, *Xihai* 西海 (Western Sea)—were subsumed under this new, distinct administrative sector inside the Qing Empire. As a result, Qinghai became a province in the Republic of China in 1929, the fourth-largest province with fourteen counties. Since 1949, Qinghai has remained a province of the People's Republic of China.

Even such a brief historical review makes it clear that Qinghai has a notable history with its own character and significance. Currently, this region's history is approached as a part of Tibetan studies (or Amdo studies, more specifically) and is also associated with Mongol studies. However, the history of Qinghai should grow as a particular local history within Qing studies as well. Such a development would, in return, enrich all the fields upon which it touches.

Although extremely understudied at present, some recently published and on-going scholarship is notable. For example, Gruschke's multivolume *The Cultural Monuments of Tibet's Outer Provinces* (2001) focuses its entire first volume on the "Qinghai part" of Amdo. My recent conference presentation (Chia 2007) and unpublished manuscripts on the *Lifanyuan* branch—the Grand Minister Resident of Qinghai—are opening the study of Qing governance in the Qinghai frontier. Rohlf's (1999) dissertation on Chinese immigrants in Qinghai during the period after the founding of the People's Republic of China has pioneered research on immigrants within Qinghai studies.

Resources for and awareness of a Qinghai-focused study have been growing. Inside China, a number of reprints of historical materials and scholarly monographs on Qinghai have offered valuable research supplies and academic studies since 1980. A sample of publications includes Pu (2001); *Qinghai difang jiuuzhi wuzhong* (1992 reprint); *Qinghai lishi jiyao* (1980); *Xining fuzhi, Xining weizhi* (1993 reprint); and Yang (1982 reprint). Recent English publications on Amdo studies also support Qinghai studies. Some such publications include Huber (2002), Normantas (1994), and Sujata (2005). Baumer and Weber (2005) also consider issues related to Amdo and Kahm, and they include a discussion of Qinghai.

Reflecting Qinghai's historical role as a part of several civilizations and its reality in a highly diverse human environment, Qinghai studies—as a regional field of research—will face enormous challenges from the various perspectives, interpretations, and explanations regarding the participating populations and their political powers. Qinghai studies can offer the academic community opportunities to look at a part of the human experience which has no straightforward elucidation but nevertheless has its own lines of local development, larger world involvement, and self-defined centers. The successful reconstruction of this region's past would depend on scholarly cooperation among academics with different disciplinary loyalties and specialties. If carried out under the aegis of Qinghai studies, such a reconstruction would intensify the entire field of China and Inner Asia.

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