

Xiong Ji

RADRENG THE REGENT

On the eve of the death of the Thirteenth Dalai in the 1930s, the political situation in Tibet was very tense, just as the wind sweeping through the tower heralded the coming storm. Splits took place within the ranks of the Tibetan officials, and the British took every opportunity to support the pro-British elements to sever Tibet from China. Thubtan Kunphel, a chief attendant of the Thirteenth Dalai, took control of administrative power, while Lungshar, the commander of the Tibetan army, secretly organized "Kyjugkunthun" (Alliance of Those Who Seek Happiness), aiming at overthrowing the Tibetan government under the pretext of "electing new Kaloons." The two cliques intrigued against each other. The pro-British faction's policy of disrupting the country's unification and national unity instantly met with vehement repudiation from the majority pro-Chinese Tibetan officials, the Buddhists in particular, who feared that the interests of Tibetan feudalist ser-owners and the Yellow Sect, protected by the central government, would be damaged by the British power, which had already penetrated into Tibet. Even the Thirteenth Dalai kept a vigilant eye on Thubtan Kunphel and Lungshar, preventing them from relinquishing China's sovereign rights over Tibet. For at that time the Chinese central government was too far and too weak to keep an effective rule over Tibet, and meanwhile the British in collusion with Tibetan pro-British elements sought to separate Tibet from China's territory. After the death of the Thirteenth Dalai the tension came to the surface.

When the Thirteenth Dalai died, the Kashag got into a heated argument on the appointment of a regent. Sonam Gyalpo in particular, hinted that Thubtan Kunphel might continue to exercise administrative power and it was not necessary to choose a regent. Others proposed that Silon Yashi Langdun hold the power. But the majority maintained that a regent should be chosen and the position of the regent should be filled by a Living Buddha with the title of Hutuku according to the traditional institution. The dispute lasted for two months, and the problem still could not be settled. At the instigation of Lungshar, the kashag accused Thubtan Kunphel of not having arranged prompt and effective medical treatment for the Thirteenth Dalai and of not having reported promptly about the health situation of the Dalai

to the kashag. Thubtan Kunphel was put into jail at once and all of his property was confiscated. He was condemned finally to be exiled, though at first he was sentenced to death. Thus, the suggestion of the majority was endorsed. Of the eight Hutuktus Radreng had enjoyed the highest respect of the late Dalai. So he was chosen as the most suitable candidate for the official post of the regent. But Radreng refused.

His refusal was due to some reasons. The suggestion that he be the regent was not approved by the high monks of the Radreng Monastery. One of them, Changzod Dzasa Jamyang Geleg, wrote a letter to Radreng and said: "We were much shocked to learn that you had been chosen as a candidate for the position of the regent, because the Living Buddhas of our monastery had never taken the position. We pray that you might not take the position."

As a high monk, honest and of great learning, Jamyang Geleg had attained good reputation in both secular and religious circles. His advice, of course, was something the Living Buddha Radreng had to take into account. Another Living Buddha, Jampal Chodrag, an ex-abbot of the Ganden Monastery, even refused to be the candidate for the post of the regent. The reason what they, people of far-sight and great learning, refused to be in the high official post, was that the Tibetan political situation was full of danger.

So the kaloons had to resort to the use of the traditional way of drawing lots before the image of Buddha to decide the appointment of the regent from three candidates: Minyang Yeshe Wangdu, Living Buddha of the Ganden Monastery; Radreng, living Buddha of the Radreng Monastery; and Living Buddha Phurchog, the reincarnation of the scripture tutor of the Thirteenth Dalai. The lot fell upon Radreng, and he was appointed the regent as a result. On the tenth day of the first month of the Wood-Dog year of the Tibetan calendar (1934), Radreng came to the throne of the regent at the age of twenty-three. At the same time, Yashi Langdun Kunga Wangchu was appointed as the deputy regent.

In the same month of Radreng's enthronement occurred the well-known "Incident of Lungshar" in the kashag government. After Thubtan Kunphel was exiled. Lungshar, in collusion with eighty other conspirators, schemed to overthrow the then existing kashag government. Superficially they asked the kashag to build a stupa for the Thirteenth Dalai and to seek his reincarnation and meanwhile accused a kaloon, Trimon Norbu Wanggyel, of being unfair in handling public affairs. But that was all a pretense to cover up their real intention: to topple the kashag. Nevertheless, their plot leaked out, Kaloon Trimon learned

about their scheme beforehand. The ringleader, Lungshar, was arrested and punished by having his eyes gouged out, put in jail life-long, his property confiscated, and his descendants could never take any post in the government. Afterwards, Lungshar was released from jail due to his sickness, and his son Lhalu Tsewang Dorje became an official in the kashag by way of greasing some officials' palms. After the struggle, the pro-British forces were weakened while the patriotic forces became markedly stronger. Accordingly the Tibetan political situation was stabilized.

After coming to power, Radreng, young and energetic, did two things to meet the wishes of both the secular and the religious circle. Firstly, he built a stupa for the Thirteenth Dalai at an expense of 18,870 ounces of gold in two years, and it was the best one of the eight stupas since the Fifth Dalai. Secondly, he discovered the reincarnation of the Thirteenth Dalai in Qinghai. But on the problem of seeking the reincarnation he came into conflict with deputy regent Yashi Langdun, who intended to choose Desid Rinpoche and delayed deliberately the announcement of the discovery of the reincarnation in Qinghai.

On the occasion of Radreng Rinpoche's taking the post of the regent, the kashag reported the matter to the Kuomintang central government in January, 1934, in accordance with the traditional institution. This was the first patriotic attitude the kashag showed ever since the Simla Conference in 1913, on which Kaloon Shadrag, as a representative of the kashag, only recognized China's suzerainty over Tibet. The Kuomintang central government approved the appointment and granted Redreng Rinpoche an honorific title, for which Radreng sent a telegram to the central government to show his thanks. In the winter of 1939, the kashag government reported the discovery of the incarnation of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama to the central government. In February 1940 the Kuomintang government dispatched a delegation headed by Wu Zhongxin to sponsor the performance of formalities for the confirmation of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and hold a title-granting ceremony for Radreng Rinpoche, and gave gifts as well. Radreng Rinpoche at once wrote a letter to the central government to show his thanks.

In the process of seeking the incarnation, moving him to Lhasa, drawing lots in the golden urn, his tonsure and enthronement - in all these important matters Radreng had reported to the central government in accordance with the old institution.

In April of 1934 the Kuomintang government sent a mission headed by Huang Musong to Tibet to pay homage to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's memory. Arriving in Lhasa in August, the Huang mission was accorded a warm welcome. Talks between the central government emissary and the Tibetan representative resulted in the decision of establishing a Lhasa office under the Commission for Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs. As a sign of goodwill, the mission supplied the Lhasa office a transmitter and helped set up a weather station, a primary school, and a clinic. In 1939 the mission headed by Wu Zhongxin was also accorded a warm welcome. Wu presided over the ceremony of the installation of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.

The above-mentioned measures taken by Radreng Rinpoche contributed much to the restoration of relations between the Tibetan local government and the central government. In 1937 the anti-Japanese war broke out, Radreng inaugurated a grand government's victory over the Japanese. Owing to his patriotic acts, in 1946 Radreng was appointed an executive member of the National Assembly by the Kuomintang government and was invited to take part in the assembly. After returning to Beijing, Huang Musong praised in his report to the central government the Dalai's sincere patriotic attitudes. Here, the "Dalai" was referred to the Tibetan officials headed by Radreng.

Of course there was another side of the facts, during the talks with Huang Musong the kashag government raised a ten-article suggestion that the Chinese central government should station no army in Tibet, that the Tibetan political and religious system should not be alternated, the autonomy and area under the Tibetan local government's jurisdiction be enlarged. Some people thought it was something similar in spirit to the so-called draft treaty of the Simla Conference, but in fact that two could not be identified. On the Simla Conference the kashag representative Shadrag openly colluded with the British to override the central government's representatives. But the "suggestion" acknowledged the Tibet was a part of China's territory instead of the China had only suzerainty over Tibet, it did not suggest to divide Tibet into Outer and Inner Tibet, and did not insist, on the British rights and interests in Tibet, etc. , as was raised on the Simla Conference. The ten-article suggestion was raised by a few officials in the kashag who had a separatist intention. However, the kashag government headed by Radreng on many problems expressed its patriotism and its respect to the leadership of the central government. What they actually did was not insisting

on the ten-article suggestion. For example, the number of the Chinese officials in fact exceeded that stated in the "suggestion," and the appointment of Tibetan officials above the khaloon level remained to be officially approved by the central government.

Some pro-British elements created trouble on the seating order during the ceremony, attempting to negate the central government representative's rights and status. Radreng tendered his apologies to Wu Zhongxin and had the mistakes corrected as soon as Wu pointed out the intrigue, which showed that Radreng put great importance on Wu's advised. Besides, there occurred the obstruction to the Ninth Panchen Lama's return to Tibet. It was in April of 1933 that the Panchen Lama first sent representatives to Tibet to talk about his returning to Tibet. At the time the Thirteenth Dalai Lama was still alive, and he expressed his welcome for the Panchen's return. However the Dalai Lama died in December that year, and, ultimately, the Panchen failed to return owing to the obstructions set up by the pro-British forces in Tibet. The pro-British elements in kashag deliberately complicated the issue and refused the panchen's return under many pretexts including that the Panchen's escort of Chinese soldiers was too big. At the same time, the British ambassador to China and his secretary held talks with the deputy minister of the Chinese ministry of foreign affairs, publicly made obstruction for the Panchen's return to Tibet and interfered with China's internal affairs. All this indicated that inspite of Radren's efforts, the pro-British force still played a role in the affairs of the kashag. Another instance was that shortly after Wu Zhongxin's arrival in Lhasa, the British also sent a party to attend the enthronement ceremony, and this party was also welcomed by the kashag. The kashag even gave consent to the British proposal of removing its commercial agency form Gyantse to Lhasa with a hospital and a radio technological school under it. All this showed that Radreng did not completely control the kashag. Nevertheless, Radreng once and again said to the Chinese officials in Tibet that so long as he was on the post of the regent, the sovereignty of China would not be lost.

During his seven-year reign as the regent, Radreng was so kind and generous to his colleagues that he was able to collaborate with public figures of various political groups. For example, the pro-British elements Cheru Zurkhang and his son, and Lhalu Tsewang Dorje who had much to complain were not excluded from the kashag. Tanpa Jamyang, who had been relieved from the post of khangchung by Thubtan Kunphel for his arrogance and

became badly off because his property had been confiscated, was promoted to be a kaloon and concurrently the commander of Tibetan troops. In addition to that, Radreng reduced or remitted taxes and took measures to meet some economic needs of the Tibetan nobles. With his correct policy and good weather, the agricultural and pastoral production enjoyed great prosperity, commodity prices were low and stable, and the Tibetan society and frontiers enjoyed peace to the satisfaction of all concerned, clerical or lay, in Tibet. Accordingly, Radreng enjoyed high reputation.

But, troubles always arose from within. In 1938 and 1939 Radreng twice submitted his resignation from the regentship. The kashag made repeated endeavor to keep him on the post. The regent was young and in good health and no reason was seen for him to resign. When pressed for the reason of his dissatisfaction, the regent replied that the assistant regent Yashi Langdun had different opinions from his, which prevented him from making any decision of his own and consequently delayed matters of installing the Fourteenth Dalai. The kashag, after careful consideration of the regent's problem, decided it would be best for the assistant regent to resign in order to facilitate the functions and decision-making power of the regent. Accordingly, the assistant regent was asked to withdraw from political activities; but he would retain a nominal deputy regentship. This should be regarded as a great mishap by the young Radreng Rinpoche. At the time of Langdun's leaving his office, other officials suspected that the regent would begin to dismiss his opponents and an atmosphere of fear and tension enveloped Lhasa. Langdun was a patriotic official. His dismissal was in fact a great loss to Radreng and made him isolated and cut off from help in difficulties. This was his very unwise move and gave the pro-British elements an opportunity to attack him.

In early 1940 (the Iron-Dragon year of the Tibetan calendrical cycle) the pro-British elements in Lhasa spread a flood of vile slanders against the regent Radreng, accusing him that he had an affair with his sister-in-law, in an effort to force him to resign. That was a fatal attack to Radreng. Owing to the slanders he might not be qualified to reside over the ceremony for the Fourteenth Dalai to take vows of bhiksu.

As to Radreng Rinpoche's sister-in-law, I often met with her during 1952-1959 when I was working at Shigatse. Her name was Tseyang Drolma. She was quite ordinary in her appearance, but she was flashily and colorfully dressed. After being expelled from Lhasa in the Radreng Incident, she returned with her property to her mother's house in Shigatse. At

the time she had a little son. Later, Tseyang Drolma remarried a Xikang merchant. Her brother Loling Sonam Wangjug several times made fun of her son before me, calling the child "Junior Rinpoche." Only this, nothing more. I have no other evidence to testify to the scandal. However, with such a pretext in their hands, the pro-British elements might easily drive away Radreng Rinpoche. The essence of the case was not simply to put Radreng's private affairs in the open air. This was an act with a hidden motive: struggle for power between the pro-British and pro-Chinese forces.

The attack was so vehement that the regent, having been plunged into deep depression, had to appeal to the oracles for aid. He asked Zimgag Lama to make an oracle for him. The oracle pointed out; If he stayed on his post it would be good for the political and religious cause, but bad for the health of the Dalai and Radreng himself; on the other hand, if he resigned and returned to practice Buddhism in his monastery, all troubles would be got rid of. Zimgag Lama, obviously, had known very well the state of affairs and the pretext the opponents made, that is, "for the health of the Dalai."

Being devoted to oracles and loyal to the Dalai, Radreng immediately called in the Radreng Dzasa Jampal Gyeltsen, the Radreng ex-Dzasa Jampal Geleg, Zimpon Khenpo Ngawang Loten, Khado Rinpoche, and Yonne Lama Losang Yeshe Namgyel to have a discussion about the situation. Yonne Lama proposed that Radreng should take a two or three year's leave and Radreng's sutra instructor, Tadrags Rinpoche, be appointed acting regent. The two Dzasas agreed with him, but Zimpon Ngawang Loten did not agree. Instead, he proposed that Radreng stay on the post, pointing out Tadrags was wicked and unreliable. Nevertheless, Radreng blamed him for his impolite words to his sutra instructor Tadrags.

Tadrags, whose full name was Tadrags Ngawang Sungrab Thubtan Tanpa Gyeltsen, was originally the abbot of a small monastery, the Radrbu Monastery in Doilungdechen. He was an unknown junior Rinpoche at the time. Late Yonne Lama recommended him to Radreng to be an assistant sutra instructor for the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and still treated him as his own tutor. At that time Tadrags was already sixty-seven years old. Yonne lama and Tadrags were good friends.

Radreng asked his close friends Kaloon Lama Tanpa Jamyang, Kaloon Phunsho Tsetan Dorje, Kaloon Phunkhang Drashi Dorje, Tripon Kasho Chokyi Nyima for advice. Radreng told them the result of the oracle and that he intended to leave the post of regent for two or

three years and let Tadrags take over the office for the time being, and then he would resume his office in two or three years. Kaloon Phunkhang suggested that he not resign; Tripson Kasho suggested that Tadrags could only be an acting regent. The others all agreed that he should resign. Then he had a talk with Tadrags about his intention of leaving office temporarily. Tadrags promised that he would return the power to Radreng in two or three years and said that he was very grateful for Radreng's kindness.

In the autumn of 1940 (the Iron-Dragon year of Tibetan calendar), Radreng the regent officially handed in his resignation to the Dalai Lama, saying that in his tenure of office he had accomplished the search and installation of the Fourteenth Dalai and made the Tibetan society and frontiers in peace, but according to the oracles, to stay on the position of regent would bring harm to his health, so he decided to resign his position as the regent.

A National Assembly was called to have a discussion about Radreng's resignation. All those who attended the meeting decided to urge Radreng to stay. They went to the Radreng Monastery and kneeling down before him, earnestly appealed to Radreng for his staying on the position, but Radreng refused. Another meeting was held, the deputies were sent again to meet Radreng who happened to be in the Potala Palace. They knelt down before Radreng and asked him to stay, but Radreng refused again. Radreng again asked the kashag to grant him a three-years' leave and to turn his duties over to Tadrags Rinpoche. Finally, his resignation was accepted.

On a meeting held afterwards, some people proposed that the new regent be chosen by way of drawing lots between Phurchog Rinpoche and Tadrags Rinpoche, but Khanchung Chophil Thubtan immediately voiced his opposition, saying that they should observe the decision of Radreng. At last a decision was made to appoint Tadrags the regent and the chief sutra instructor for the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. When the chief deputies went to have an interview with Tadrags and ask him to take over the post of regent, he expressed that he was so old that he would be in the position as the regent only for two or three years and then return the power to Radreng. This decision of the National Assembly was written down on an official document, which firstly praised Radreng's merits achieved during his tenure of the regent, and then says clearly that "Radreng Rinpoche, in order to counter-act bad omens, would temporarily return to his monastery for meditation, and Tadrags Rinpoche would take over the regentship for two or three years. By the end of this period Radreng Rinpoche would

continue to be the regent until the Dalai Lama comes to power." This decision was made into four copies, Radreng, Tadrug, the Kashag and the Tibetan Assembly each having a copy, and each copy being sealed officially. On January 16, 1941 (the eleventh month of the Iron-Dragon year) Radreng Rinpoche sent his resignation by wire to the Kuomintang central government and took his leave from the regentship officially in the twelfth month of the Iron-Dragon year. Tadrug's appointment was reported to the central government on February 18, 1941 (the twenty-third day of the twelfth month of the Iron-Dragon year). Tadrug officially took over the post as the regent and the chief sutra-instructor for the Fourteenth Dalai Lama on the first day of the first month of the Iron-Serpent year. To Radreng's resignation, the central government did not take a clear-cut stand; but as to Tadrug's appointment, the government's answer was: "the case may be put on record."

The above-mentioned historical facts indicate that Radreng Rinpoche enjoyed immense popular support, even his opponents could not launch an attack publicly. Some people said Radreng Rinpoche was "naive" and "immature". This, of course, was referred to his ignorance of political trickery. As an honest high monk, it was a matter of course that he did not know how to play politics. He was no match for those who acted one way in public and another in private. The honest people of the later generations all felt sorry for Radreng Rinpoche's resignation. The process of history is always tortuous and complicated and has reverses, which was caused by many factors. Superficially, Radreng offered his resignation of his own accord, and Tadrug was willing to take over the regent's post. But in fact Radreng's resignation was determined by the objective situation and subjective factors. Owing to it a turn in the course of events emerged, and a historical tragedy was bound to appear.

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