

གཙུག་ཁྱིམ་

Chentsa

Chinese: Jianza Xian

尖扎县



roll/neg: 54:15

subject: wide angle view of the town

location: Chentsa Dzong གཙམ་ཆོ་རྒྱལ་, Malho མཎ་ལོ་ Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Tsongön ར་ཆོ་སྤྱོད་

[Ch: Jianza 尖扎县, Huangnan 黄南 TAP, Qinghai Province]

approx. date: winter 1995/1996

comment: In the distance is the Machu (Huanghe, Yellow R.). Across the river is Haidong Prefecture with two million inhabitants, at least two thirds of them Chinese and Hui. Official population in Chentsa is about 49,000, with a 60% Tibetan majority claimed. The true Tibetan proportion is probably lower. Demographic pressure is intense: population density in Chentsa, the nearest to Xining and Haidong, is 28 persons/km². The next county, the capital, Regong, has 21. In Tsekhog it is 7 and only 4 in Yülgan.
(Viewed from the south.)

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b. **Chentsa [Ch: Jianza]**

i. **Brief description and impressions**

Chentsa གཙོ་མོ་རྫོང་། (Ch. Jianza Xian 尖扎县) is one of the most vulnerable of all the Tibetan counties to patterns of development preferred by China. Only the Yellow River (Ma Chu), edging its northern border, now divides it from the densely-populated Chinese and Hui region of Haidong Prefecture. This geographical feature once served as a clear and formidable marker between a totally Tibetan world to the south and a region which, though sinicizing gradually over the centuries, did not overleap the Yellow River until the Communist Chinese occupation. Chentsa was one of the last areas of Amdo to be subdued by the PLA, but was subsequently transformed into a Chinese colonial region with relative ease. In the early occupation era its agricultural potential attracted Chinese land reclamation projects, with the inevitable concomitant of Chinese and Hui immigrants. Now its waters are to be harnessed to a national hydro-electric scheme that will transform it from a rather sleepy edge of a TAP into a magnet for industrial and urban development. In 1990 Chentsa had only a narrow Tibetan demographic majority. Little is required to tip the balance against the Tibetans. The Lijiaxia 李家峡 hydro-electricity project makes future immigration, on a large scale, a certainty, and the designation of Chentsa as an “autonomous” Tibetan area increasingly a fiction.

The Chentsa county seat, Maketangzhen 马克唐镇, lies along the eastern edge of the county on the south bank of the Yellow River. Although the town is located 1.6 kilometers off the Xining-Regong highway via a bridge over the river, it currently functions as the gateway to Malho TAP from Haidong Prefecture and the Xining City district, only 127 kilometers southeast of Xining by a good sealed road and a daily parade of public buses. Tibetan settlement filters through Haidong, but most of its countryside and settlements are dominated, commercially and agriculturally, by the Hui. Once across the pass above the Yellow River, the Tibetan presence increases conspicuously. But with over 3 million Chinese and Hui across the Yellow River immediately to its north, Chentsa's 29,000 Tibetans represent a demographic void - less than 1% of the total population of Haidong and Xining. It is a fertile region, much of it suited to Chinese-style agriculture, with a mild climate and the extensive drainage areas of the Yellow and Longwu 隆务河 Rivers. Most significantly for the future, it will soon be supplying hydro-electricity on a scale to support hitherto unprecedented industrial and urban development along the reaches of the Yellow River north of Maketangzhen.

The Chentsa county town, at an elevation of 2,100 meters, lies in a strikingly beautiful setting. Steep eroded formations rise from the Yellow River banks into wrinkled mountains and mud-cliffs of purple, red, sienna and gold, the colors of the landscape shifting with the light and clouds. At the bridge leading to the town the river runs 250 feet wide, boiling into loud low rapids downstream. Cultivated fields cover the river flats, while sheep and goats graze in the rugged but strangely fragile-looking hills. Heralded by a sizable grain processing factory on its eastern outskirts, Maketang turns out to be a small, pleasant, compact town, utterly Chinese in appearance, populated by less than 7,000 people in 1993 according to official statistics [see photo 54:15, p. 2160]. Many of the town residents are Chinese and Hui. Tibetans form a significant component of the population too, especially in the surrounding villages, but since most town-dwelling Tibetans appear to be government or unit workers they are not identifiable by traditional dress. There are no monasteries adjacent to the town, although a couple lie within 5 kilometers. But for a chöten in the distance and some prayer flags on the surrounding peaks, there are few signs of Tibetanness other than the Tibetans themselves.

ii. **Historical background**

Chentsa was a Qiang domain until the 5th Century, after which it came under the political control of a succession of Chinese dynasties whose territories reached into the eastern fringes of Amdo. As the seat of the Chinese border administration of Kuozhou during the first half of the Tang Dynasty, Chentsa came under constant attack from the Tibetans who had occupied most of the former Tuyuhun Empire in Amdo. After 760 the Tibetans themselves occupied Chentsa, quickly transforming it into a Tibetan political and cultural domain. Buddhist monks who sought refuge in Chentsa from Langdarma's persecution of the religion in Central Tibet were able to preserve Buddhism in Amdo, from whence it was disseminated back into Ü and Tsang. Nyingma and Sakya activity flourished in Chentsa under the Kingdom of Gyelse and through the century of Mongol overlordship. Later Mongol invasions penetrated Amdo in the 16th and 17th Centuries which resulted in the settlement of some Mongol tribes among the Tibetans in Malho. This situation was to have repercussions in the 19th Century when pressures on grazing land intensified as Chinese settlement expanded outwards from the Xining district.

When the Qing Dynasty declared a protectorate over Amdo in 1724, the Tibetan chieftains of Chentsa were also placed under the authority of the Xining Amban. Chentsa had enjoyed a period of active monastic foundation since the latter 17th Century under the influence of the Gelugpa, and was by this time an important Tibetan

religious and cultural enclave in the strategic Yellow River region. Conflicts over grazing lands led to Qing armed campaigns against the Tibetans in upper Malho on several occasions after 1806, and Tibetan attacks on the Xining districts. Some Mongol tribes were forcibly relocated to Yülgan, and northern Malho became an even more thoroughly Tibetan demographic domain. Chinese and Hui settlement, and political control, increased north of the Yellow river, however.

Chentsa was one of the last areas of Amdo to be occupied by the Chinese Communists due to a two-year armed struggle against them by a regional Tibetan chieftain. Since then Chinese population transfer policies and economic immigration in recent years have reduced the Tibetans to a narrow majority in Chentsa, and then only officially. Lying on the edge of Haidong Prefecture and now the site of a massive national hydro-electric scheme on the Yellow River, Chentsa stands little hope of escaping deepening levels of Chinese development in the near future.

iii. **Current demography**

Chentsa's population totalled 48,083 according to the 1990 census, of whom 27,007 (58%) were reported to be Tibetan, 9,988 (21%) Hui and 8,675 (19%) Chinese¹. But according to official sources, population had declined to a total of 43,100 by the end of 1994², a drop of 10.4% over the four year period. Chentsa is one of the 40% of Tibetan counties in TAP reported to have nil or negative growth from 1990 through 1994 [see Table 6, p. 59]. In most cases where site visits were possible, an assertion of falling population dramatically conflicts with impressions of growth, especially in county seats themselves. It is possible Chinese statisticians could depict a declining Chinese population, at least on paper, by keeping track of Chinese persons who complete their purpose in the county and leave. Tibetans and Hui certainly are not leaving in significant numbers nor have they lost their penchant for having larger families. For the county's population to have declined by 10% it would have been necessary for more than half the Chinese to depart (leaving fewer than 4,000 in the entire county), for no new Chinese to have arrived, and for native peoples to have suddenly achieved 0% population growth. A candid and complete accounting would likely show none of those had occurred.

¹ *China Population Statistics Yearbook 1990*

² *Statistical Yearbook of Qinghai 1995*

An exodus of staff and workers from a completed government project could explain the loss of 5,000 registered residents within the 4-year period, or relocation of population from an area flooded by a newly-built dam. The national-level hydro-electricity project at Lijiaxia on the Yellow River, scheduled for completion in 1999, might involve relocation of residents affected by the works, although no sources have been encountered suggesting population relocation and subsequent reduction of county numbers. Another official source records a 1993 county population of 42,000 people, of whom only 9.6% (4,000 people) were Chinese and the remainder “national minorities”³. Since this source identifies essentially all the people missing between 1990 and 1994 as Chinese, a government project involving Chinese personnel may well have been dismantled. No clues positively identifying such a project have been found in sources so far consulted, unless the Kangyang Farm 康杨农场, probably originally settled by Chinese forced labor, has become redundant due to the construction of the power station at Kangyang and its residents transferred elsewhere. But even if five thousand Chinese were shifted out of the county between 1990 and 1992, the implied condition that no Chinese have arrived since then challenges credibility. And besides the absencing of those five thousand, 0% growth in the remaining population would have been necessary for 1994 population to have been at the stated level.

Qinghai Province itself provides a demographic brain teaser in that official figures show the population grew by 1.55% annually from 1990 through 1994⁴ yet, also according to official sources, not one part of the province had a growth rate over 1%. Half had negative growth [see Chart 6, p. 61].

Additional demographic details for Chentsa can be found in Tables 12 and 23 [see pp. 175 and 1599] and Charts 49 and 49a [see pp. 2111 and 2112]

On-site observation, as is invariably the case, points to higher Chinese numbers in the county than official statistics allow. Large numbers of Chinese economic immigrants who have moved, permanently or temporarily, to Chentsa will not be recorded among the official population since they are registered elsewhere. Members of the ‘floating population’ born without official permission, and therefore denied official registration of their existence, are registered nowhere. Many Chinese have come to the county town in recent years to take advantage of expanding commercial opportunities there, an easy journey of only four hours from Xining to a pleasant

³ *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, p. 600

⁴ 1990 population was given as 4,456,946 in *China Population Statistics Yearbook 1990*; 1994 population was 4,740,000 according to the *Statistical Yearbook of Qinghai 1995*

destination. Chentsa's economic level stands high within Qinghai, at least for some: average income in the county town was over 2,000 Yuan in 1993⁵, and the per capita GDP a startling 5,313 Yuan in 1994⁶. The Liji Xia hydro-electric project would also have necessitated the importation of substantial numbers of workers, technicians, administrators and other personnel associated with this very large undertaking. None of these Chinese project workers, entrepreneurs and their families will show up in population statistics, but their presence and the results of their activity will impact Tibetans in Chentsa.

Official statistics categorized 88% of Chentsa's population as rural in 1993⁷, the majority of whom, though not all, must be Tibetan and Hui, since the combined ethnic minorities comprise only 81% of the total county population⁸. Chentsa's agricultural economic base accounts for its high population density of 28.3 people per square kilometer, the second highest after Tika (Guide) among TAP counties in Qinghai Province. In 1993 the total population of Maketangzhen, the county seat, was officially stated as 6,737 people, of whom almost 70% (4,692) were classified as town residents and the remaining 30% (2,045) as rural population in the 6 villages within the municipality⁹. Many of these villagers are clearly Tibetan. Within the town, all the county's ethnic groups have a strong presence. The Hui typically limit themselves to the commercial and trade sector, whereas Tibetans and Chinese form the bulk of work unit employees, with the Chinese also heavily involved in business enterprises. Tibetans may form the overall majority in the municipality, by a small margin. The visible cultural impact they have been able to make on the town is, however, almost non-existent.

Considering Chentsa's attractions to potential Chinese and Hui immigrants, it is perhaps surprising not to find even more of them here. But this represents the lull before the storm. Chentsa lies a mere 127 kilometers from Xining by a good sealed road, the second closest of any non-TAR Tibetan "xian" town to a provincial capital (Dashi, in Tsojang, is closer to Xining). Directly across the Yellow River, Chentsa's northern boundary, spreads the densely-populated Haidong Prefecture, with 2 million people, where agricultural land is already over-loaded and Chinese and Hui entrepreneurial energies have been released since the economic reforms of the 1980's and

⁵ *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, p. 600

⁶ *Statistical Yearbook of Qinghai 1995*

⁷ *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, p. 600

⁸ *Social and Economic Statistical Yearbook of Qinghai 1992*

⁹ *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, p. 600

1992. Most significantly, the national hydro-electricity project on the Yellow River confirms the State's intention to develop the surrounding districts - Chentsa, Tika and Hualong Counties - into an industrial and urban satellite region less than one hundred kilometers south of Xining. The newest government building in Chentsa in fact belongs to the Electric Power Company [see photo 54:20, p. 2181]. This policy is of course no secret, but part of the main thrust of the 9th Five-Year Plan which aims at encouraging government-sponsored development in the economically backward Northwest. Unfortunately for local Tibetans, this will inevitably entail heavy Chinese population influx as soon as the basic requirements for such development are in place. Since the Lijiaxia hydro-electricity project should be completed in 1999, Chentsa may expect its demographic and economic transformation to commence around that time. The slight population advantage Tibetans are officially reported to enjoy in Chentsa will be overturned and Chentsa will become another county in a TAP where Tibetans are no longer the majority.

iv. **Administrative and control apparatus**

Chentsa's power organs have recently been given new premises in the main street, where the Communist Party, CCP Discipline Inspection Committee and County Government share a plain but bulky five-story office block. Further down the street the Government Hostel provides accommodation for visiting cadres and tourists, probably built slightly earlier in the late 1980's. Economic support units are predictable in number and profile for a small county town, all housed in buildings constructed since the 1980's economic reform era: a new tax office, Construction Bank, People's Insurance Company. The most prominent compound in town is occupied by the Electric Power Company, whose white five-storied block with '90's-style reflecting blue glass windows rises next door to its more modest '80's predecessor [see photo 54:20, p. 2181]. The Electric Power Company's dominant new presence is the only real clue in the town of the development soon to overtake Chentsa when the Lijaixia hydro-electric power station is completed.

None of Chentsa's control units occupy updated premises. All but a small supplementary PAP compound are located along the town's upper east-west street, forming a control-unit quarter consisting of the Court, Procuratorate, PSB and PSB Detention Center on the north side of the street, and a PAP compound, guarded but not signed, on the opposite side. The PAP compound is more extensive than many seen at the county-level, and may hint at duties other than normal internal security. Although the research team found no evidence of

currently-functioning labor camps within Chentsa, the Kangyang Farm north of the county town may well have been started as a forced labor agricultural facility in the early days of the Chinese occupation, even if it runs as an ordinary state farm now. An incomplete slogan inside the PAP compound suggested involvement with labor camp or forced employment facilities somewhere else within the county. Currency and interpretation of the slogan is otherwise uncertain. The PSB Detention Center, which stands behind the adjacent Procuratorate and PSB compounds, consists of four cell blocks surrounded by a high walk-around wall with four corner guard towers. A slogan on the external wall exhorts incoming inmates to accept punishment for crime. The facility is large for the size of Chentsa's population [see photo 54:27, p. 2183].

No PLA facilities or personnel were observed in the county.

v. **Economy**

Chentsa would make an interesting, in-depth study not only for its demography but for its unusual economic profile. GDP in 1994, 229 million Yuan¹⁰, was the highest in Malho by a wide margin. Both primary and tertiary components of GDP were slim, 32.3 million Y and 19.8 million Y respectively¹¹. The primary industry figure is too low to account for anything other than farming and pastoral production, resulting in an artificial reduction of the county's true output by transferring the value of extracted minerals and ores to provincial or national units. But secondary production was a startling 176.9 million Yuan in 1994¹², one of the highest levels seen in a TAP county. Industrial processing or manufacturing, probably of raw materials produced in the county, appears to have been reasonably well established. Buoyed by that productivity, per capita GDP was 5,313 Y in 1994¹³, the second highest of any county in a TAP.

Additional economic details relevant to Chentsa can be found in Tables 9, 13 and 28 [see pp. 127, 184 and 2116] and Charts 14a, 15-18 and 50-51 [see pp. 122, 123-126 and 2113-2114].

¹⁰ *Statistical Yearbook of Qinghai 1995*

¹¹ *Statistical Yearbook of Qinghai 1995*

¹² *Statistical Yearbook of Qinghai 1995*

¹³ *Statistical Yearbook of Qinghai 1995*

Watered by over 100 kilometers of the Yellow River and its tributaries, Chentsa supports one of Qinghai Province's richest agricultural regions, the reason for its high population density relative to other TAP counties. Spring wheat and rapeseed, both marketable crops, are the main produce of the county town area and the river valleys, while in more mountainous districts orchards, vegetables, barley, potatoes and peas are cultivated¹⁴. Farmers are mainly Hui and Tibetan, with Tibetans predominating the further south one proceeds in the county, but a smaller proportion of farmers are also Chinese. At least some of the Chinese farming community were forced labor transferred to Chentsa under government schemes during the early days of occupation, when Chentsa's agricultural potential represented a valuable resource to the grain-starved Province. Land reclamation schemes such as the Kangyang Farm north of the county seat beside the Yellow River involved population transfer from the more populous Xining districts as well as from inland China during the 1950's and 1960's¹⁵. Such Chinese transferees form a permanent component of the county population, having now raised their own children and grandchildren in Chentsa and having no prospects of returning to their places of origin.

Despite Chentsa's good agricultural production capacities, official economic statistics reveal primary industry's share of GDP was only 14% in 1994. Per capita rural net income was correspondingly low. Farmers earned an average income of 493 Yuan in 1993¹⁶, less than the average for Malho TAP in 1992 (517 Yuan)¹⁷. When development accelerates under the impetus of the completed Yellow River hydro-electricity projects, Chentsa's agricultural potential will come under increased pressure. Tibetan produce suppliers may find this economically beneficial, but concomitants of expanded urban and industrial growth also include environmental degradation and land requisition for factories and urban spread. The main disadvantage for Tibetans will be their outnumbering by Chinese immigrants.

(1) **pastoralism**

¹⁴ *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, pp. 600-601

¹⁵ For this period see June Teufel Dreyer, "Ch'inghai", pp. 19-41

¹⁶ *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, p. 600

¹⁷ *China Nationalities Economy 1993*

True nomadic pastoralism is less common in Chentsa than Tibetan areas further south, as the arable Yellow River valleys give way to high grassland and mountains. Farmers in Chentsa who do not exclusively practise agriculture also raise sheep, cattle and some pigs. The latter industry has been seen in other Tibetan areas to expand in relation to the size of the Chinese population, so may be expected to increase in Chentsa under the same circumstances.

(2) **natural resources exploitation**

County authorities realize that the abundant and fast-flowing waters of the Yellow River and its tributary the Longwuhe 隆务河¹⁸ are Chentsa's most valuable natural resource, and are relying on the State's ambitious hydro-electric projects north of the county town to promote economic development in Chentsa in the near future¹⁹. The first Yellow River hydro-electric power plant within Chentsa County was the Gulangti 古浪堤 Power Station, built in 1972 during the post-Cultural Revolution period of industrial construction, but now being superseded by the major engineering work of the Lijiaxia Hydro-Electric station 李家峡水电站, to be completed by 1999, and two medium-sized stations at Zhiganglaka 直岗拉卡 and Kangyang 康杨²⁰. The State also plans to construct another big power station at Gongboxia 公伯峡. Works of this size and complexity are of course State projects, designed to promote development of the whole eastern Qinghai region in compliance with 9th Five-Year Plan policy to fund economic growth in the "backward" regions of the Northwest. The policy rests on the overall ideology of developing Chinese-administered territories for China's benefit, not on concepts of promoting economic "autonomy" in "autonomous" regions.

Iron, copper, lead, gold, mica, coal and limestone are already mined in Chentsa. China considers natural resources the property of the State²¹. It is to be expected that primary production (32.3 million Yuan in 1994) is far too low to account for anything except county farming and pastoralism. The value of the ores and minerals taken from Chentsa would appear at a statistically higher level. Substantial deposits of rock containing high

¹⁸ The Longwu River flows into Chentsa from Regong to the south, providing a valuable secondary watershed in the southeast of Chentsa County.

¹⁹ *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, p. 600

²⁰ *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, p. 600

²¹ *The Constitution of the People's Republic of China*, 4 December 1982, Article 9

concentrations of calcium fluoride, an essential ingredient in the smelting of high quality steel, have been reported in recent official publications, as have large calcite deposits²². Exploitation does not appear to have started yet.

Chentsa has areas of forest cover but evidence of heavy lumber exploitation was not observed in the county town itself other than minor wood processing facilities. Official sources state that forest products earned only 2.5% of total agricultural output value in 1993²³. Marketable wildlife products - fur, meat and medicinal ingredients - are also considered economic assets by the authorities, as are medicinal plants. A deer farm has been established in the neighborhood of Lamo Dechen Chökhörling, possibly a county-level operation although this has not been established²⁴.

Except in the field of medicinal plant collection, employment in the mining industry and possibly employment on the deer farm, resource exploitation in Chentsa offers few benefits to the local Tibetans. Natural resources in “autonomous” counties are consistently treated as the property of the Chinese State, not of the local inhabitants whose “autonomy” does not stretch to guide the use of their own natural resources.

(3) **industrial**

Chentsa’s county town has some industrial facilities, though none which would seem to be the source of the county’s high GDP derived from secondary industry - 77% of the county’s total GDP. A large grain and oil processing factory stands on the outskirts of the town just across the Yellow River bridge. In 1993 ten factories operated in the county according to official statistics, producing cement and cement products, bricks, sand products, wine, furniture and building materials²⁵. None of these could account for Chentsa’s secondary industry GDP being the largest of any non-TAR Tibetan county after Lunggu (Wenchuan) in Ngawa T&QAP (not including Golmud and the Xining districts). Two other possible sources identified from Chinese references are the Qinghai Province Glass Fibre Factory²⁶, whose productivity may be counted in provincial statistics rather than

²² *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, p. 600

²³ *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, p. 600

²⁴ *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, p. 600

²⁵ *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, p. 601

²⁶ *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, p. 697

those for Chentsa County, and the prefectural-level aluminum factory being constructed at Liji Xia in 1993, which may not yet have gone into production²⁷.

Hydro-electricity production remains the only logical source for Chentsa's high secondary-industry GDP figure, and highlights the importance of the Liji Xia and related Yellow River projects to Chentsa's economic planners, who see them as the means to turn Chentsa into a great electricity output base which will then support expanded agriculture and industry²⁸. However, since the first of these power stations was scheduled to go into production only in 1996²⁹, the high figure for 1994 remains a mystery.

Industrial workers in Chentsa, wherever their factories are, receive high returns for their labor compared to rural workers. In 1994 their average annual income was 4,800 Yuan³⁰, a marked increase from 3,039 yuan in 1993³¹. Chentsa's per capita GDP is also extraordinarily high, at 5,313 Yuan in 1994, surpassed in a non-TAR Tibetan-area administrative division only by Golmud and paralleling that of highly-developed eastern seaboard Chinese provinces like Jiangsu (5,778 Yuan) and Fujian (5,294 Yuan)³². Most of Chentsa's residents would be surprised to realize this. For most of them, whether Tibetans, Chinese or Hui, life is lived at a modest economic level, not reflective of per capita GDP.

(4) commercial and retail activity

Chentsa at present displays moderate commercial activity, typical of a small county town in a TAP, which also means that most commerce is in the hands of Chinese and Hui. The reasonable selection and supply of consumer goods and manufactured foodstuffs reflects Chentsa's proximity to Xining and Haidong Prefecture. When immigrant population increases as a result of hydro-power-released development potential, current commercial

²⁷ *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, p. 600

²⁸ *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, p. 600

²⁹ *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, p. 599

³⁰ *China County and Township Yearbook 1995*; essay on Chentsa County

³¹ *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, p. 600

³² *Statistical Yearbook of China 1995*

trends will follow suit - Chinese manufactures will be distributed and managed by Chinese and Hui, not Tibetans, who will participate only at the consumer end of the chain in their own “autonomous”-area county.

vi. **Educational and medical facilities**

Chentsa county town has a primary school and large nationalities middle school, adequate facilities for a small “xian” town, and as is usually the case, facilities which demonstrate some of the highest levels of activity and functionality. Official sources claim that there are 72 “nationalities” schools in the county, including three middle schools, and that Tibetan classes are offered as a medium of education³³. The process of sinicization looks well advanced in Chentsa at least in the county town, where the presence of a “nationalities” middle school will not stem the assimilation of local Tibetan children into the pervasive Chinese social and economic system. Education in China, whether the regular or “ethnic” stream, aims to promote the concept of a unified State through “ethnic fusion”³⁴. Taking some classes in their own language allows ethnic students to become literate therein, but in other ways they are simply fitted for a future within the greater Chinese political, economic and social world which controls them, whether they live in an “autonomous” area or not. Good intentions of school staff and some education department workers do not alter the essential thrust of Chinese education policy in national minority areas, which is to train national minorities to become compliant “Chinese” citizens.

Chentsa has been provided with the standard County Hospital in the county seat, and apparently a Tibetan medicine hospital somewhere in the county³⁵: It was not located by the researchers in the county town though may be part of the County Hospital complex..

vii. **Culture**

³³ *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, p. 600

³⁴ See the article on “ethnic education” in Mongol schools by Wurlig Borchigud, in Harrell (ed), *Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontiers*, pp. 278-300

³⁵ *China County and Township Yearbook 1994*, essay on Chentsa County, p. 600

To all outward appearances Maketang is a thoroughly sinicized county town. In terms of public facilities, architecture, or even mock-“nationalities” architectural decoration, Tibetan culture is nowhere to be seen. Except that local Tibetans so vehemently identify themselves as Tibetan and a small number of the municipal district villagers retain elements of Tibetan dress, nothing that the Chinese have constructed since their occupation connects the town with its thousand-year old continuous Tibetan history. In terms of its civic environment it might have been implanted directly from somewhere in the Chinese heartland.

Gradually, however, a Tibetan cultural presence impinges. A few monks walk the streets, some of the almost one thousand-strong in the county. Stands of prayer flags claim the peaks surrounding the town. The district village population appears predominantly Tibetan, even if many have opted for modern dress. Further into the countryside villages increasingly take on Tibetan distinctions: prayer flags on the roofs, more traditional dress, village shrines, carved and painted woodwork, and 15 Gelug and 3 Nyingma gönpas distributed among the ten “xiang” of the county³⁶. These signs signify the strength and resilience of Tibetan culture and identity. Unfortunately they may not be able to stand against the weight of Chinese and Hui population, and Chinese economic development just across the Ma Chu. The Chinese shape and substance of the county town already links Chentsa into the Chinese world.

viii. **Religion**

Chentsa contains some of Amdo’s oldest Buddhist sites and historically important associations, dating back to the dark period of Langdarma’s persecution of Buddhism in the 9th Century, when Amdo was still under the Tibetan imperial administration. In 842 Langdarma’s assassin, Lhalung Palgye Dorje, escaped from Central Tibet to Amdo, where he subsequently lived in some caves in the cliffs above the Yellow River four kilometers west of the Chentsa county seat. The three hermit monks who fled from the Lhasa region to Amdo during Langdarma’s persecution also settled in Chentsa among the Tibetan nomads there, and are considered responsible for the preservation of Tibetan Buddhism in Amdo despite its extinction in Central Tibet. By the 11th Century Nyingma and Sakya monks had already built several monasteries in Malho, and Nyingma and Sakya teachings continued to flourish there until the Gelugpa ascendancy after the 17th Century, when many monasteries converted to the Gelugpa and new Gelug monasteries were founded. Gelug gönpas were still being founded in

³⁶ *Bright Mirror of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries in Qinghai*, p. 23

Chentsa in the first half of the 20th Century. In 1958, prior to the Chinese religious persecutions following the Tibetan revolt in Amdo, Chentsa had 18 monasteries housing almost 2,000 monks. All of these have now been re-opened, though with a total monastic community reduced by half to 864 monks in c.1990³⁷. Chentsa's large number of active monasteries and, relative to the county population, large number of monks, preserves the long historical tradition of Tibetan Buddhism in upper Malho to a heartening degree, considering the restrictions of Chinese religious policy.

The cave-dwellings of the 9th Century monk escapees near the Chentsa County seat are the county's oldest religious site. By 1992 ten nuns reside in the simple complex, Lodo Ngedrag ལོ་དོ་རྒྱལ་, that clings to the foot

of the tawny water-sculpted cliffs above the Yellow River³⁸. Chentsa's largest monastery, Lamo Dechen Chökhörling ལ་མོ་བདེ་ཆེན་ཆོས་འཁོར་གླིང་།, founded in 1682 by Lamo Rinpoche, became the leading Gelugpa

foundation in Chentsa from the 18th to the 20th Century, exercising both religious and political influence over a wide local area and its branch monasteries in Bayan (Hualong), Tongkor (Huangyuan), Tika (Guide), Mangra (Guinan) and Dashi (Haiyan)³⁹. 522 monks lived in the monastery before its closure by the Chinese in 1958. Following its re-opening and restoration after 1980, the monk community has grown to 172⁴⁰, a number likely to represent the quota placed on admissions by the Chinese, rather than the much larger number of Tibetans who would like to join as monks, a situation reported throughout Tibetan areas.

ix. **History**

Malho, the fertile region south of the Yellow river (Ma Chu), was occupied in ancient times by branches of the Qiang peoples, with whom the Chinese came into conflict when they began to penetrate the districts of the Huangshui Valley east of Tsongön (Lake Kokonor) during the Han Dynasty. The Shaodang Qiang, the fiercest

³⁷ *Bright Mirror of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries in Qinghai*, p. 23

³⁸ *Bright Mirror of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries in Qinghai*, p. 177

³⁹ *Bright Mirror of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries in Qinghai*, p. 23

⁴⁰ *Bright Mirror of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries in Qinghai*, p. 175

of the Qiang confederations opposing the Chinese, managed to confine Han expansion to the region east of Tsongön and blocked it in upper Malho. After the fall of the Han in 220 AD fighting between the Qiang, various successive regional dynasties and a new power in the region, the Tuyuhun, continued. By the late 5th Century the Tuyuhun had established themselves as rulers of a huge domain that stretched as far east as Tongkor (Huangyuan) and almost to Tika (Guide), but did not include the upper edge of Malho. The region of Chentsa, at this time still inhabited by Qiang tribes, remained within Chinese political territory, first within the Northern Wei commandery of Huanghejun 黄河郡 and then under the Northern Zhou for a short period in 572. Once the Sui Dynasty had reunified China in 589 it became part of the Sui commandery of Jiaohejun 浇河郡, then of the Tang commandery of Kuozhou 廓州 when the Tang defeated the Sui in 618.

The Tang Dynasty placed the seat of Kuozhou at Chentsa and garrisoned a large army at Tika facing the Tuyuhun, with whom the Tang immediately came into severe conflict along the eastern fringes of Amdo. Although the Tang defeated the Tuyuhun king in a decisive campaign of 635, Kuozhou remained particularly vulnerable to Tuyuhun and later in the 7th Century, Tibetan, attack. After the Tibetans also defeated the Tuyuhun in 663 and occupied most of their former territories in Amdo, they concentrated their garrisons and fortifications immediately west of Tika along the Yellow River, directly challenging the Chinese border positions there for a century. In 760, when internal rebellion forced the Tang to withdraw their frontier garrisons from Amdo, the Tibetans occupied Kuozhou and incorporated all the Tang border territories into the Tibetan Empire. Chentsa (Kuozhou) fell within the military governorship of Madrom, a Tibetan imperial administration that apparently stretched south from the Yellow River into Golog⁴¹.

Chentsa became a center of Buddhist revival when Langdarma's persecution of Buddhism annihilated monks in Central Tibet. Although the imperial administration in the peripheral territories collapsed, Amdo had by now developed into a dominantly Tibetan sphere. A Tibetan kingdom under a regional chieftain, Gyelse, held political sway in eastern Amdo during the 11th Century. By this period Nyingma and Sakya monks had already begun to build Buddhist monasteries in Chentsa, a process that gained momentum under the Mongols who absorbed Amdo into their vast Empire in the 13th Century. Five monasteries founded in Chentsa during the Mongol overlordship have survived to the present day⁴².

⁴¹ G. Uray, "Khrom", p. 313

⁴² *Bright Mirror of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries in Qinghai*, p. 23

When the Ming succeeded the Mongol Yuan Dynasty in China in 1368, their first priority in the Sino-Tibetan border region was to gain control of places where there had been Yuan officials, such as in Xining and Hezhou (Linxia). They next undertook defensive campaigns in the border areas, sending a punitive expedition against Amdo chieftains in 1377 who expressed opposition to the new Chinese presence on the edge of their territories⁴³. Thousands of Tibetans were killed during the campaign, after which the Ming established fortifications along the frontier but did not attempt to extend direct control further west. Chentsa lay at the edge of the Sino-Tibetan political divide, although Tibetan settlement extended north across the Yellow River into the Huangshui districts, where the Ming began an energetic program of colonization. Hostilities between the Tibetans and Chinese erupted sporadically throughout the 15th Century. Mongol invasions into Amdo after 1512, and both Mongol and Tibetan attacks on Chinese positions thereafter, forced the Ming to strengthen their frontier defenses. Mongol settlement in Amdo displaced Tibetan dominance in some areas, but gave renewed impetus to Tibetan Buddhism when the powerful Tümtü leader, Altan Khan, converted to Buddhism and bestowed the title “Dalai Lama” on the head of the Gelugpa in 1583. The Chinese maintained their jurisdiction and agricultural colonies in eastern Amdo until the fall of the Ming in 1644, but their line of control extended only towards upper Malho, not into it, and Chentsa was never occupied.

The Qing re-established the Chinese position in eastern Amdo shakily at first. Malho was now under the overlordship of the Qosot leader Gushri Khan, a strong patron of the 5th Dalai Lama and the Gelugpa. Opposition from Tibetans, Mongols and local Hui plagued the Qing in the Xining districts through the 17th Century, though it was a flourishing period for Gelug activity in Amdo, including Chentsa, where the Lamo Dechen Chökhörling was founded in 1682. Qing policy in relation to the borderlands changed as a result of provocative events in the early 18th Century, first the invasion of Lhasa by the Dzungar Mongols, and then a rebellion against the Qing by Mongols in Amdo in 1723. The Qing consequently established a protectorate over Amdo, placing the Tibetan and Mongol chieftains under the direct authority of an Amban (resident official) in Xining, registering the tribes and delimiting their pastoral territories. As long as the Tibetans and Mongols remained peaceful, the Qing did not intervene in their affairs, concentrating instead in consolidating their own defensive position in the outer reaches of eastern Amdo and the Xining districts.

By the early 19th century the Qing maintained administrative posts at Xunhua, Hualong and Tika, although not within Chentsa. The Dalai Lama also had a commissioner in Amdo concerned with trade and monastic controls

⁴³ *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 7, p. 130

until c.1865⁴⁴. Conflicts among Mongols, Tibetans and the Qing intensified during the 19th Century, however. Particularly in upper Malho and the Xining districts issues of pasture use by Mongols and Tibetans, control of the tea trade and the spread of Chinese and Hui farming provoked bitter fighting. Tensions escalated into armed struggle in 1806. When Tibetans crossed to the north bank of the Yellow River in 1822 to extend their grazing lands, the Qing sent troops against them. Many Tibetans were killed in the fighting, which erupted again in 1828 and 1832. Forcing some Mongol tribes from upper Malho to move to Yülgan (Henan) in 1838, the Qing then carried out a census of Amdo Tibetans and divided them under a household registration system as a tighter form of control. Tibetan opposition in Malho led to further Qing expeditions against them in 1845 and 1850.

Tibetans in the Xining and Yadzi (Xunhua) districts rebelled against the Qing again in 1875, but Chentsa and the rest of Malho remained undisturbed until the establishment of the Republic of China in 1911, followed almost immediately by the seizure of de facto power in eastern Amdo by the Hui Ma clan who had risen to prominence as a result of the Moslem Rebellion and its aftermath. By now Hui agricultural settlement had intensified north of the Yellow River above Chentsa, and reclamation schemes involving Chinese and Hui settlers were extended in Tika as early as 1912. In 1916-17 some Tibetans in Malho became involved with a Qing monarchist insurrection centered on Tika and Regong, but it was crushed by Ma Lin's troops and its leader strangled in prison in Xining⁴⁵. Chentsa received little notice from either the Chinese or the Ma clan thereafter. Even after the founding of Qinghai Province in 1929 it was not made a separate administration, but came under the jurisdiction of Tika (then Guide County). In practise it remained a thoroughly Tibetan district, where monasteries were being founded into the 1940's⁴⁶.

Chentsa proved particularly resistant to the Communists when they tried to extend their control over Amdo. The Tibetan chieftain of Chentsa, who controlled varying portions of more than five counties, successfully resisted PLA attacks until May 1952, when a final annihilation campaign was mounted against him⁴⁷. An army of 10,000 PLA troops defeated the main Tibetan contingent after two days of fighting, though it took another ten days to

⁴⁴ L. Petech, *Aristocracy and Government*, p. 13

⁴⁵ *Qinghai lishi jiyao (Outline of Qinghai History)*, p. 589

⁴⁶ *Bright Mirror of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries in Qinghai*, pp. 176, 303

⁴⁷ June Teufel Dreyer, "Ch'inghai", p. 7

hunt down all the Tibetan forces⁴⁸. Following the Tibetan defeat, many Communist cadres were sent to Chentsa, where an administration was formed from the eastern portion of Tika and named the Jianza TAR in 1952, reduced to Jianza County in 1953⁴⁹. Chinese and Hui settlers were transferred to the banks of the Yellow River to promote agricultural development, a critical priority for Qinghai whose grain-producing capacity was far too limited for the increased population that the Communist occupation entailed. In 1958 Tibetan revolt against the occupation broke out across Amdo. Once it was quelled, monasteries were closed, monks forcibly returned to lay life, collectivization completed and thousands of Tibetans implicated in the revolt sent to labor camps. The disastrous policies of the Great Leap Forward, followed by the chaos and destruction of the Cultural Revolution, subjected Tibetans of Chentsa and most of Amdo to widespread famine and hardship. Recovery only began in the early 1970's. Chentsa's development with Chinese characteristics has proceeded to a stage where the mechanisms and processes of control, exploitation and assimilation are all well advanced. The Yellow River hydro-electricity project will set the conditions for the next, more advanced stage.

x. **Summary comment**

Chentsa has a long and significant Tibetan history, but now stands in a particularly vulnerable position vis-a-vis Chinese immigration and development. It not only directly adjoins the Chinese-Hui population center of Haidong Prefecture (and thus Xining), but has already been targeted for intensified industrial-urban development through construction of a major, national-level hydro-electric scheme within its boundaries. From the perspective of wider Chinese economic strategy, Chentsa fits into the network of development that will stretch from Chentsa's Yellow River hydro-electric scheme westwards into Tsolho TAP to the Longyangxia Dam in Tika and across towards Chabcha, where commercialization, industrialization and intensified, settled pastoralism are all proceeding on the Chinese model. Such inter-prefectural economic planning reflects centrally-directed policy, not decision-making by "autonomous" Tibetan areas. Whatever the considerable strength of Tibetan culture in the county at large, it is the sinicized county seat that foreshadows Chentsa's future.

⁴⁸ *Jiefang Qinghai (Liberating Qinghai)*, p. 504

⁴⁹ *Zhongguo diming cidian (Dictionary of Chinese of Place-Names)*, p. 342

Sites tagged on photographic panoramas not accompanying text report

Panorama labels:

Chentsa/Jianza

frames 54:17-25, 9pc

Bureau of Meteorology

Bus Station

CCP Discipline Inspection Committee

Cinema

County Communist Party

County Court

County Government

County Hospital

County PAP

County Prison

County Procuratorate

County PSB

Electric Power Company

Government Hostel

Grain Processing Factory

Nationalities Middle School

Nationalities Trade Bldg.

PAP

People's Insurance Co.

Tax Office

to Tongren

to Xining

Yellow River (Huanghe)



<u>roll/neg:</u>	54:20
<u>subject:</u>	town center with Government, Party, commercial area
<u>location:</u>	Chentsa Dzong གཙམ་ཆེན་པོ།, Malho མཎ་ལོ། Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Tsongön རི་ཁོ་སྤོན། [Ch: Jianza 尖扎县, Huangnan 黄南 TAP, Qinghai Province]
<u>approx. date:</u>	winter 1995/1996
<u>comment:</u>	Chentsa's vulnerability to non-Tibetan settlement is evidenced in every corner of the town. Across the Machu lie Haidong and Xining, with more than three million Chinese and Hui. The main street here is pleasant, but not Tibetan. The tall white building on the left side is the Electric Power Co. Beyond it, on the same side, is the County Government and Communist Party. A left turn at the next corner leads to the PSB, Detention Center, PAP, Procuratorate and Court. (Viewed from the south.)
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roll/neg: 54:27
subject: PSB Detention Center
location: Chentsa Dzong གཅན་ཚང་, Malho མཎ་ལོ་ Tibetan Autonomous
Prefecture, Tsongöñ མཆོ་སྤྱན་
[Ch: Jianza 尖扎县, Huangnan 黄南 TAP, Qinghai Province]
approx. date: winter 1995/1996
comment: The county PSB Detention Center is larger than those seen in many
other Tibetan areas. The PAP compound is partially visible in the
lower right foreground. The Procuratorate has a red Chinese flag in
its courtyard. The PSB is in front of the prison. County population is
about 49,000 with 41% Chinese and Hui, a proportion which appeared
to be understated. Haidong Prefecture, with its 2 million mostly
Chinese and Hui, is just across the river.
(Viewed from the south.)

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