AN INVASION OF THE NORTH INDIA AFTER 
HARSHA’S DEATH

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The story of a Sino-Tibetan invasion of North India in the reign of Anjana, the usurper of Harsha’s throne, is recently discussed by a scholar in Chinese language and history in a book titled The Chinese Annals in the Dynastic Histories of the Tang Period. Since our publication of the earlier version of The Red Annals, Namgyal (Tibet and Its Inhabitants, 1981) is referred herein as a principal source, I may be permitted to present in outline of Tibetan sources the relevant texts from Tibetan tradition with my reading of the relevant lines in The Red Annals.

The earlier version of The Red Annals is in archaic style and in places the expressions are rather cryptic. The relevant words about the Sino-Tibetan invasion are in the print of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetanology (P 9) are:

"དོན་དབུ་བོ་བོད་དང་ཕུ་ཡུ་དོན་དབུ་ བོའི་བོད་དང་བོད་དཔེ་།issionཔ་བོལ། གཞལ་ མ་ས་ བོད་ལོ་ བི་ོ་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ་ བོད་ལོ

A literal translation in English may be made thus: “The envoy sent to India by Tai Tsong was convinced in Magadha. Having head the (Indian) victory Tibetans sent an army and Magadha was conquered.”

Different Tibetan versions were collected by Geun Chhopel (Oga-dun-thog-’phal) he well-known Amdo scholar who took interest in ancient inscriptions and old books in the manner of the modern Western scholarship. He was a well-known figure in the second quarter of this century and his Deh-deg-pa of The White Annals is now available in modern print (Tibetan Freedom Press Darjeeling 1964).

I give below a free translation from PP. 75-76 of this book.

“When Harsha (Tib.Oga’-bu) was alive he sent a Brahman (Tib.Branga) to present gifts to the Chinese emperor. Harsha was the author of the drama Napananda (Tib.klu-kun-tu-dga’-ba’-gi-dar) which one finds in Tanjur (Bstan’gyur). There is a Sanskrit Avadana (Tib.rog-bi-grol) in verses which was written by Bana Shatitz (Tib.Ngags kyi gsal-po) in India, in the 22 year of Chang Tsew and 1182 years after the passing away of the Lord Buddha, the (Chinese) emperor...
(T'al Tsong) sent an envoy named Wang Huaun Ts'a'o (Tib. Vang-han-tsa) and thirty other messengers were sent to India. At that time Harsa was already dead and the envoy witnessed the time when the country was not in peace. Harsa having no son, the minister Arjuna (Tib. Srid-sgrub) was on the throne and was causing great harm to Buddhism. Arjuna provoked the (Chinese) envoy and killed most of his friends and looted the baggage. Wang Huaun Ts'a'o himself and few friends escaped in the dead of night and reached Nepal, which was under Tibet and sought the refuge with Songtsen Gampo (Tib. Ston-gtsen-Sgyam-po). The Tibetan king sent a crack regiment of 1,200 Tibetan soldiers and 7,000 Nepali cavalry to India. With the envoy they reached Hirahita. In round about three days battle they (Tibetans) captured the main capital. They killed about 3,000 Indians and about 1,000 were thrown into the nearby river. King Arjuna escaped but he brought new army and offered yet another battle but at last he was defeated by the Tibetans and he (Arjuna) with relations were caught alive and sent to Chinese emperor. The emperor was very pleased and when T'al Tsong died, a statue of the Tibetan king was made in front of the temple as a mark of remembrance for his deeds'.

I do not intend to enter into the many disputed points about this particular Sino-Tibetan invasion after Harsa's death, and would only emphasize certain facts firmly handed down in Tibetan tradition. First, there were several Tibetan invasions into different parts of Northern India in the time of Songtsen Gampo and his successors; such invasions into Chian in the east and Li-yul, (Eastern Turkestan) in the north are admitted by modern historians. Secondly, after Harsa's death Buddhism not only lost its state patronage but was undergoing much persecution; in Eastern India Sesanka's persecution of Buddhism in Bengal itself is well known; such conditions might have invited the anger of the great Tibetan protector of Dharma (Tib. Choyrgyan/Skt Dharmaraja). Thirdly, Arjuna's treatment of Chinese envoy gave the Tibetan king an opportunity to vindicate the Dharma in Phagyuil (Phugtul/Skt. Anyabhumgi) itself as well as to prove the superiority of the Tibetans over the Chinese.

Two very significant facts in Gedun Chupa's account are (1) description of the Indian region which the Tibetans invaded; and (2) the identification of the statue in front of the Chinese emperor's tomb. The region is called Hirahita, and Gedun Chupa included Malia, Saky, Lichchhavi, Vri and Sonakuhja in Hirahita. Scholars of Sanskrit and Chinese may consider whether Hirahita can be derived from
Hiranyakasthi (cf. L. Peitchev: *Northern India according to the Shui-ching-chu*, PP. 25-33; Rome 1950). The statue which was placed in the front of the Chinese emperor’s tomb is that of Tibetan king and not that of Indian king held as prisoner.

Gedun Chophel does not say that both Songtsen Gampo the victor and the Indian king the prisoner were commemorated in statues as some Chinese sources, reported by the Indian Sinologist Professor Bagchi, suggest (*Shio-Indian Studies*, Vol. 1, part 2, P. 99).