THE TIBETAN TRADITION OF GEOGRAPHY

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Geography, as a scientific description of the physical world, did not develop in Tibet in a manner analogous to that of western civilizations. Physical geography with its study of the earth's surface, climate, and the distribution of flora and fauna did not emerge as a branch of learning. Historically speaking, only two traditions evolved : political geography and religious geography. The commonly used term, "political geography" requires no special clarification here, but the concept of "religious geography", which is as familiar to Tibetans as it is strange to foreigners, needs some explanations. The term "religious geography" is used in this article to refer to that corpus of Tibetan literature which describes the geographic location and the religious history of sacred places and things without reference to the physical features of the region or its flora and fauna.

Since religious geography is a characteristic of the Tibetan tradition and is substantiated by various autochthonous monographic studies, it will be discussed first in this article. The tradition of political geography, which reflects the historical evolution of the Tibetan state, is not found in such monographic studies and must be reconstructed from diverse data found in unrelated textual materials. In view of the fragmented and often hypothetical nature of the "political geography" tradition, it will be discussed last in this article.

RELIGIOUS GEOGRAPHY

There are various examples of Tibetan literature which may be grouped together and classfied as religious geographic literature. These texts are intended primarily to describe the geographical location and religious history of pilgrimage places, sacred objects, and the hermitages of former Buddhist holy men. They are devoid of specific information on physical geography *per se* and are better understood when thought of as *guide-books* for pilgrims visiting unfamiliar places and things.

The corpus of this geographic literature may be divided, for the sake of convenience and discussion in this article, into the following general types :

Dkar-chag[1]	("Register")
Gnas-bshad	("Guide-book")
Lam-yig	("Passport")
Go-la'i kha-byang	("Global-description")

The first type, the "register", is limited to the description of a single pilgrimage place with an account of the various sacred objects to be found there.[2] A lengthy example of this type is the *Lha-ldan sprul-pa'i gtsug-lag khang-gi dkar-chag shel-dkar me-long* ("The bright mirror register of the emanated temple of Lha-ldan [=Lhasa]") by the V Dalai Lama Blo-bzang rgya-mtsho (1617-1682). This register is a detailed account of the sacred objects found in the Jo-khang temple in Lhasa and comprises the entire volume *Dza* of the V Dalai Lama's collected writings (gsung-'bum).[3]

In contrast to this detailed register by a famous author, there are many short registers by anonymous authors. An example of this type is the *Bal-yul mchod-rten 'Phags-pa shing-kun dang de'i gnas-gzhan-rnams-kyi-dkar-chag* ("Register of the Nepalese stupa 'Phags-pa shing-kun [=Svayambhunath] and other pilgrimage places"). This text is a xylograph of only ten folios and is printed in the Sgrol-ma'i lha-khang, a temple near the Svayambhunath stupa itself. No author is mentioned in its colophon.[4]

The second type, the "guide-book", describes more than one pilgrimage place and offers terse directions how to travel between them. A very short example of such a guide-book is the *Bal-yul gnas-yig*, a xylograph of only eleven folios, which lists the various significant pilgrimage places one encounters when traveling from India northward to, and including, the Kathmandu valley.

Perhaps the most distinguished and detailed guide-book found in religious geographic literature is the *Dbus-gtsang-gi gnas-rten rags-rim-gyi mtshan-byang mdor-bsdus dad-pa'i sa-bon* ("Short summary of the pure names of some of the holy places and images of Dbus and Gtsang; called the Seed of Faith") by 'Jam-dbyangs mkhyen-brtse dbang-po kun-dga' bstan-pa'i rgyal-mtshan (1820-1892).[5] This guide-book in twenty-nine folios gives directions to pilgrims how to travel from one to another of the more famous pilgrimage places in the central Tibetan provinces of Dbus and Gtsang. It is an excellent source of proper orthography of place names as well as a survey of the significant monasteries, temples, images, and hermitages together with a brief historical account of them. This valuable guide-book like the others of the "religious geographic type" is devoid of special information on flora, fauna and topography.

The third type, the "passport", as indicated by the term implies a guide-book for pilgrims whose pilgrimage involves

travel between two or more countries. The most famous example of the passport type of geographical text is the *Shambha-la'i lam-yig* ("Passport to Shambhala") by the III Panchen Lama Blo-bzang dpal-ldan ye-shes (1738-1780).[6] This passport-type of guide-book involves international travel for it describes the way in which one must proceed in order to travel to the paradise of Shambhala. Shambhala is the realm ruled by the Kulika kings, who have preserved the teachings of the *Dus-kyi 'khor-lo rgyud* (Kalacakra-tantra) and who will eventually destroy the heretics and a new age of Buddhism will begin.[7]

The last type, the "global-description", is unique and represented by a single text, the *'Dzam-gling chen-po'i rgyas-bshad snod-bcud kun-gsal me-long* ("The mirror which illuminates all inanimate and animate things and explains fully the Great World") by Bla-ma Btsan-po Simin-grol sprul-sku 'Jam-dpal chos-kyi bstan-'dzin 'phrin-las (1789-1838).[8] This comprehensive geography in 146 folios is a description of the known world and was compiled in 1820 by the Bla-ma Btsan-po during his residence in Peking, where he had access to European geographies as well as Russian and Chinese ones. His accounts of the western world, which were based on inadequate secondary sources, are interesting and at times amusing.[9] The chief value of his work is the section on Tibet (folios 58-81) which surveys the religious geography of Tibet from Stod Mnga'-ris in the west, to Ru-bzhi of Dbus-Gtsang in the center, and to Khams and A-mdo in the east. This section is unique in Tibetan geographical literature because it is a "guide-book" to all regions of Tibet, not just one or two.

On the other hand, this "global-description" by Bla-ma Btsan-po should not be considered a true type within the Tibetan tradition of religious geography. Every chief monastery and temple has its own register (*dkar-chag*) and guide-books (*gnas-bshad*) are available for various regions of Tibet and bordering areas. The passport (*lam-yig*) type, although involving international pilgrimage particularly to a Buddhist paradise, is adequately substantiated in the geographic tradition; but the global-description (*go-la'i kha-byang*) is evidenced only by the text of the Bla-ma Btsan-po. Moreover, there is an inconsistency in the geographical writings of the Bla-ma Btsan-po, which indicates that he viewed Tibetan geography from the traditional "religious" function, but viewed the western world through the eyes of the foreign geographers

whose works he used. For example, his description of Tibetan topography is concerned exclusively with pilgrimage places, as seen in the following passage: "In the region southwest of there is Yar-lung. There are such things there as the three receptacles (rten-gsum) namely: the mchod-rten called Gung-thang-'bum-mo-che, Tshe-rgyal-'bum-pa, and Theg-chen-'bum-pa,....."[10]; but his description of the western hemisphere arrives at physical geography. Compare his passage: ".....[in South America].....due to the excessive warmth, there are many kinds of fruits and many kinds of crops (obtained) without plowing, such as *ma-kai* (maize). Since there are a great many birds, such as domesticated fowls which change color, and fish and game animals, the people of those countries always have a livelihood and so there is no poverty."[11] From this contrast between his "religious geography" for Tibet and "semi-physical geography" for foreign countries, it may be postulated that the Bla-ma Btsan-po, who was living in Peking at the time, had to rely upon *written* Tibetan geographical literature; all of which reflected the "religious" tradition of geographic description. Since the Bla-ma Btsan-po's monumental work is unique in Tibetan literature, it should perhaps not be considered a true type of geographical text, but rather an exceptional type.

POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

As noted earlier, "political" geography—unlike "religious" geography—was not the subject of singular studies in Tibet and thus there are no available monographs on this type of geography; however, data relating to the political areas of Tibet are found in various and diverse sources which provide an insight into the Tibetan tradition of "political" geography.

For the sake of convenience, Tibetan political history may be divided into four major periods—(1) legendary, (2) dynastic, (3) hegemonic and (4) theocratic. The legendary period, as implied by the name, represents the pre-historical period characterized by fact, legend, and myth. There are no sources—indigenous or foreign—to shed light on Tibetan concepts of political areas prior to the development of a written script in the seventh century A.D.

Dynastic Period (629-842)

The "dynastic" period began with the reign of Srong-btsan sgam-po (ascended 629—died 649) because it was during

his time that the nucleus of the Tibetan kingdom began to expand into a royal empire. The kingdom inherited by Srong-btsan sgam-po included the regions of Dwags-po, Rkong-yul, Ngas-po and Rtsang-bod, as well as the country of Sum-pa, which had been subjugated in the time of his father.[12] The division of the kingdom in central Tibet into the "Four Banners" (Ru-bzhi) appeared early in the dynastic period and is attested by documents found at Tun-huang.[13] As the nucleus of royal power was expanded into an empire various regions were brought under Tibetan domination. The Yang-t'ung people in the northeast were subjugated first, then the 'A-zha, who occupied the area near Lake Kokonor. Next defeated were the Tang-hsiang, who lived to the east of the 'A-zha ; which extended the Tibetan empire over the region known as A-mdo and brought it up to the frontier of T'ang China. Zhang-zhung, the region lying to the west of central Tibet, was subdued in the time of Srong btsan sgam-po as well.

The empire was expanded northwesterly into Li-yul (Khotan) and the "Four Garrisons of An-hsi", which controlled the area currently known as Chinese Turkestan, were captured during the reign of Khri Mang-slon mang-rtsan (ascended 650-died 676). Following the death of this king, Zhang.zhung revolted and its resubjugation eventually led to its incorporation into the Tibetan empire to such an extent that its own language and cultural identity died out.

Although the Tibetans lost control of the Chinese Turkestan region to the Chinese in 692, they retained domination over most of the other subjugated regions until the middle of the ninth century. That region, comprised of the areas known as Stod Mnga'-ris, Dbus, Gtsang, Khams, and A-mdo, was under Tibetan control for over 200 years resulting in the firm establishment of the Tibetans with their language and culture. This, then, was the origin and extent of the geographical area referred to in later times as "ethnic" Tibet in contrast to "political" Tibet.

Hegemonic Period (842-1642)

The Tibetan empire collapsed in the middle of the ninth century for various reasons, not the least of which was the assassination of the anti-Buddhist king, Glang-dar-ma, in 842, which led to schisms in the royal lineage and subsequent fragmentation of the kingdom and loss of "political"

unity. Thus began a period of "hegemonic" rule that endured for centuries.

A nebulous form of political unity was restored in central Tibet in 1247, when Sa-skya Pandita Kun-dga' rgyal-mtshan (1182-1251) was invested with authority over the Khri-skor bcu-gsum (Thirteen Myriarchies) by the Mongol Prince, Godan son of Ogodai Khan. It is to be noted that the Thirteen Myriarchies did not comprise all of "ethnic" Tibet; only the regions of Dbus, Gtsang and Yar-'brog. Sa-skya Pandita, as head of the Sa-skya-pa sect, became the first lama to rule central Tibet—in theory, if not in fact—and his investiture marked the beginning of that unique form of government found in Tibet where the secular authority is held by an ecclesiastic.

'Phags-pa (1235-1280), a nephew of Sa-skya Pandita, became the religious teacher of Qubilai Khan, who first invested 'Phags-pa with authority over the Thirteen Myriarchies and then over the Chol-kha Gsum (Three Provinces), namely: (1) Dbus-Gtsang, 2) Mdo-stod and (3) Mdo-smad. These last two provinces are the areas of Khams and A-mdo respectively; therefore, 'Phags-pa was invested with authority over "ethnic" Tibet. Although the Sa-skya-pa sect lost its political supremacy in Tibet by the middle of the 14th century, the ensuing rulers considered themselves as masters over "ethnic" Tibet as a "political" unit.

Theocratic Period (1642-1959)

The theocratic period of Tibetan political history began with the rise to political and religious supremacy by the V Dalai Lama and the resultant form of government endured until the occupation of Tibet by the Communist Chinese in the 20th century. The Tibetan traditional concept of "ethnic" Tibet ramained generally consistent during the theocratic period; however, the extent of "political" Tibet was reduced by the loss of border regions to China.

In 1724, the province of Mdo-smad (A-mdo) was integrated into the Manchu empire as the province of Ch'ing-hai by the Yung-cheng Emperor (reigned 1723-1735) following the suppression of a Mongol revolt against the Manchu throne.

In 1726, the eastern portion of Mdo-stod (Khams) was taken under Manchu rule when the Sino-Tibetan frontier was moved from Ta-chien-lu (at 102 degrees east longitude) west-

ward to the Bam Pass (at 99 degrees east longitude) and the area was known as province of Hsi-k'ang.[14] After this, "political" Tibet extended from Ladakh in the west to the upper reaches of the Yangtze River in the east; a geographical region that remained generally constant until the overthrow of the Manchus and the fall of the Ch'ing Dynasty in 1911.

Disagreement between Tibet and China over the location of the Sino-Tibetan frontier was one of the primary factors which caused the rupture of the tripartite meeting at Simla in 1913-1914. The meeting was held to resolve various questions relating to the mutual interests of the governments of Tibet, China and Great Britian. At the meeting, Blon-chen Bshad-sgra, the plenipotentiary for Tibet, demanded that the frontier be moved back to Ta-chien-lu where it was prior to 1726, and the Chinese plenipotentiary demanded the frontier be moved further westward to Rgya-mda', a village about one hundred miles east of Lhasa itself. The Chinese demand was based upon the fact that the military expedition of 1910 under the command of Chao Erh-feng had established an outpost there for the assault on Lhasa.

Sir Arthur Henry McMahon, the British plenipotentiary, sought to resolve the disagreement by suggesting that the 1726 Sino-Tibetan frontier at the Bam Pass be retained and the area known as the Hsi-k'ang province would be called Inner Tibet and administered by the Chinese. The area west of the Pass would be called Outer Tibet and would remain autonomous. This compromise solution was acceptable to the Tibetan Government, but not to the Chinese, which refused to ratify the Simla agreement, thereby forfeiting its rights of suzerainty over Tibet as specified in the agreement itself.

The governments of Tibet and Great Britain ratified and adhered to the Simla agreement, which established and controlled trade relations between the countries of Tibet and British India as well as demarcated the frontier between those two countries by the so-called McMahon Line, which ran from the northeastern border of Bhutan eastward to Burma. Although not specifically resolved by the Simla agreement, because of the Chinese refusal to ratify the agreement, the Sino-Tibetan frontier of 1726 continued to be regarded by the Tibetans as the *de facto* boundary between their country and China.

CONCLUSION

As stated at the beginning of this article, there are two traditions of geography in Tibet—"religious geography" and "political geography". There are several textual examples of "religious" geography, but no monographic studies by Tibetans on "political" geography. This is easier understood when it is remembered that the written language served the primary didactic purpose of transmitting Buddhist teachings and most Tibetan literature is devoted to "religious" subjects. Although there are no books on "political" geography, the Tibetans have a definite tradition of "political" areas and boundaries which reflects their historical concepts of "ethnic" and "politi al" Tibet. Perhaps because of the domination of subjectivism over the Tibetan intelligentsia, other types of geography—physical, economic, and topographic—did not develop because they represent an objective description of the phenomenal world.

NOTES

1. The system of Tibetan transcription used in this article is that described in Wylie, "A Standard System of Tibetan Transcription", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 22 (1959), pp. 261-267.

2. For a detailed discussion on dkar-chag and the value of such registers, see Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, Vol. 1 (Rome, 1959), p. 153-ff.

3. This dkar-chag by the V Dalai Lama was the basis for Waddell's description of the Jo-khang. See L. Austine Waddlell, "The Cathedral of Lhasa" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1896).

4. A similar guide to the other major stupa in the Kathmandu valley, namely Bodhnath, goes beyond the usual limits of a dkar-chag. This guide, titled *Mchod-rten chen-po Bya-rung kha-shor-gyi lo-rgyus thos-pas grol-ba* ("The history of the great stupa Bya-rung kha-shor [=Bodhnath], by the hearing of which one is saved") a forty-folio xylograph, which includes an historical account (lo-rgyus) of the stupa, is an anonymous work printed in a temple near the stupa itself. Although titled a "history" (lo-rgyus), it should be considered one of the dkar-chag type.

5. This valuable guide-book was translated with footnotes by Alfonsa Ferrari (1918-1954), whose work was completed and edited by Professor Luciano Petech under the title : "mK'yen brtse's Guide to the holy places of Central Tibet", *Serie Orientale Roma*, Vol. XVI (Rome, 1958) xxii, 199, and 53 photographic plates.

6. This work has been translated by Grunwedel under the title : "Der Weg Nach Shambhala", *Abhandlungen der Koniglich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.* XXIX, Band 3 (Munchen, 1915).
7. Helmut Hoffmann, *The Religions of Tibet,* (London, 1961), p. 124-ff.
8. The Tibetan section (folios 58-81) of this work have been translated with footnotes by Turrell Wylie under the title: "The Geography of Tibet according to the 'Dzam-gling-rgyas-bshad", *Serie Orientale Roma,* Vol. XXV (Rome, 1962) xxxvii, 286 and a map.
9. Turrell Wylie, "Dating the Tibetan Geography 'Dzam-gling-rgyas-bshad through its description of the western hemisphere", *Central Asiatic Journal,* Vol. IV-4 (1959), pp. 300-311.
10. Wylie, "The Geography of Tibet.....", p. 90.
11. Wylie, "Dating the Tibetan Geography.....", pp. 308-309.
12. F. W. Thomas, *Ancient Folk-Literature from North-Eastern Tibet,* (Berlin, 1957), pp. 1-13.
13. See, *inter alia,* Bacot-Thomas-Toussaint, *Documents de Touen-Houang Relatifs a l'Histoire du Tibet,* (Paris, 1940-1946), p. 25.
14. Wylie, "The Geography of Tibet.....", p. 182, note 618.

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