

Notes & Topics

SOME ASPECTS OF TIBETAN LEARNING

Mr. Richardson's article (pp.5-8) throws light on a little recognized aspect of Tibetan learning, namely, interest in antiquities and objects which are not directly connected with the Chhos (Dharma). He has appropriately hinted that Tibet in the first half of the 18th century (A.C.) had produced a Lama who had the same spirit of scientific enquiry as Sir William Jones, the founder of Asiatic Society of India, in the second half of the same century.

It is not denied—and such denial will be against the spirit and soul of Tibetan civilization—that from the time that the Sacred White Lotus (Dam-chhos-päd-dkar) blossomed in Tibet, all learning grew around and under the auspices of religion. History or historical scholarship was no exception. This process can be described in the words of a non-Tibetan scholar as in the following quotation,

“In the beginning Tibetan chroniclers were inspired by the Chinese tradition of Shih-chi (the Records of the Scribe—the Records of the Historian). This meant a meticulous regard for events and their dates. The Indian tradition with its indifference to mundane happenings and their chronological sequence was the antithesis of the Chinese Tradition. Under the Indian impact the Yig-tshang (Tib. for archives or records) changed its character and Tibetan scholarship founded its own school of historiography. Though the habit of chronological sequence and firm dating lingered all emphasis was now on the history of religion, its origins in India and its spread in the Trans-Himalayas. The Dharma was eternal and everything else was transitory. Therefore nothing but the story of the Dharma deserved recording. The ideal history was no longer the Records (Yig-tshing) or the Dynastic Annals (Rgyal-rabs) but the growth of the Religion (Chos-'byung). The scholars of Tibet, from Buston onwards, drew inspiration not from the China, nor from India but from the dominant phenomenon around them, the Social Milieu—to adopt a label from Arnold Toynbee's repertory”.

“As Sinologist Balazs says, Chinese history was written by bureaucrats for bureaucrats. It will be true to say that Tibetan history was written by believers (Tib. Nangpa) for believers, by Lamas for Lamas”.

“Tibetan historical writing has as its subject the dominant phenomenon—the Spread of the Doctrine. The facts recorded mostly relate to propagation, rise and development of different schools and sects,

building of monasteries and temples and the lives of saints and preachers. Much of the narrative is informed with faith and miracle. Yet a hard core of historicity with an authentic chronology makes the Tibetan historical literature an indispensable source today. It preserves most valuable data for the history of the neighbouring countries like India and Mongolia too''.

I have taken the above excerpts from *Tibet: Considerations on Inner Asian History* by N.C. Sinha, with the kind permission of the publishers Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay.

I propose to draw the notice of the reader to the habit and custom of collecting and preserving ancient historical objects in the monasteries, temples and private houses in different parts of Tibet. Some of these objects were no doubt used in ritual and some were non-ritualistic objects used by Religious Kings, incarnations, monks and scholars, while quite a good number would have no direct connection with the propagation.

I may first mention Khyentse Rimpoche's (mKhyen-brtse-rin-po-che) well-known guide book for pilgrims in Central Tibet (composed little more than a century ago), which is now available in English translation by Ferrari with notes by Petech and Richardson (Rome, 1958). The book gives an insight into the rich collection of relics, sacred art objects and many non-ritualistic items in the monasteries and temples concerned. Though there is much which a modern reader will call legendary, those objects and their description make a good source of information for historical enquiry. Date and provenance of an object can very well throw light on the chronology and contemporary life.

The objects which are directly connected with religion are kept in a separate apartment called Nang-ten (Nang-rten) in big monasteries and temples. The Nang-ten may contain a Dorjee (rDor-rje) or a Phurpa (Phurpa) used by an eminent Lama, a religious painting presented by a Mongol emperor to a Tibetan Lama, a set of Neten-chudug (gNas-brtan-bcu-drug/16 Mahasthviras) in a unique clay model, a bell with the Sutra of Yedharma (All those things springing from cause etc.). Now any of these may have an inscription in some obscure and archaic form, throwing light on Tibetan script. An unusual decorative motif on a sacred object can tell a story of its own. The different types of representation of Neten-chudug contains much of iconography not yet known.

The objects which are not sacred relics or directly connected with the religion are known as Yang-ten (gYang-rten). The observations about Nang-ten would also hold good for the collection called Yang-ten. Besides much can be learnt about costumes and ornaments or bows and

swords used from time to time. The cap of king Gesar and the sword of his uncle (Khro-thung) preserved in a monastery of Eastern Tibet, if available now, would stimulate a modern historian as much as they cause wonder to a Tibetan believer.

Among the important collections would be those of the great Sakya (Sa-skya) monastery, Tsorphu (mTshur-phu) and Tashi Lhumpo (bKra-shis-lhun-po) in Central Tibet, Ka:thog (Ka:-thog) and Kashi (Ka-bshi) in Kham and Jeykubum (rJe-sku-'bum) in Amdo, besides of course Jokhang, Samye and Potala. Private houses like that of Ragasha in Lhasa also could hold the attention of historians or antiquarians.

The coins and seals alone as collected in monasteries and private houses would bring to light many unknown facts and features not only about the history of Tibet but also about the surrounding countries. Catalogues containing most faithful illustrations of coins and seals with description of such objects were popular. It is understood a few such books have been brought by some Tibetan refugees. It is much desired that these books are read by experts like Mr. Richardson along with Tibetan Lamas versed in reading ancient scripts and motifs.

Tibetan interest in geography other than religions geography is now known thanks to Professor Turrel Wylie's publication of Zamling-gyeshed ('Zam-gling-rgyas-bshad) (Rome, 1962). The previous Situ incarnation had written a book of travels to Central Tibet in 1920s. Though much of the book is about monasteries and sacred places, it has much valuable information on roads and stages, rivers and passes, towns and villages.

Another scholar of 20th century (A.C.) Gedun Chhophal (dGe-'dun-chhos-'phal) took much interest in rock inscriptions and ancient books as can be seen from the pages of his wellknown White Annals (Tibetan text, printed in Darjeeling, 1964).

I have not written this note to supplement or to contradict in any way Mr. Richardson's article. On the other hand as a Tibetan I am thankful that a great saint scholar of Tibet, Ka:thog Rigzin Tsewang Nurbu, has been properly appreciated for his many sided intellect. I understand that Mr. Richardson did not readily agree to publish what he considered a very hastily done first draft. I must thank the editor of the *Bulletin* who persuaded Mr. Richardson to contribute this first draft. Mr. Richardson will no doubt tell the modern scholars about the great scholars of Tibet later.

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THE CONTENTS

The contents of this *Bulletin* are of varying size; requirements of an article determine its size, and size does not suggest its merits. We do not apologize for an article of two and a half pages from Sir Harold Bailey, the leading authority on Central Asian languages as we do not ask the readers to be patient with the ninety pages on an obscure Mahayana text from Pandit Aiyaswamy Sastri. Our readers, even the so-called general readers, appreciate the varied fare of Tibetology irrespective of varying dimensions.

Though we do not go by quantity we have a schedule of 120 pages (text matter besides prefaces) for a year as without a schedule fixed in advance regular publication can not be organized. Though this issue (No.3) has just 20 pages (in a small type) of text matter the total for this year exceeds 150. In the coming year we look forward to 150 pages (in a small type as in this issue) without increasing the annual subscription. This increase will be mainly because prayers and hymns of different sects (original in Tibetan script and English translation) will be a feature in 1968 and 1969. Mr H.E. Richardson's new findings about archaic scripts and Mr. N.C. Sinha's introductory chapters from his work on Lamaist Polity will be among other contents.

MRT

DEMCHOK

In his article on the Kathog Lama, Hugh Richardson refers (p 8) to the modern Chinese reading of the civil war in Ladakh and the Lama's peace efforts in 1751-52. For the general reader of this *Bulletin*, the facts may be detailed here.

Disputes between princes (or tribes or sects) in Inner Asia often led to alignments with or interferences by other powers in the neighbourhood. Such alignments or interferences would not ipso facto presume questions of sovereignty but could change the power structure. There would be thus anxiety on the part of the old and established powers to maintain status quo and peace.

When in 1750 the Dzunggar power threatened to interfere in the dispute between the princes of Upper and Lower Ladakh, the Tibetan authorities (Dalai Lama VII and Pho-lha) had reason to strive for peace. Ladakh, though dominantly Nyingma and Kargyu, had intimate cultural and commercial relations with Lhasa. Pho-lha had veneration for the Kathog Lama and knew that being not a Gelugpa the Kathog's stock would be high in Ladakh. The peace mission was therefore entrusted to a saint-scholar acceptable to the old Sects in Ladakh. His efforts however did not produce lasting peace.

Two centuries later the People's Republic of China read these infructuous peace efforts as the proof of Lhasa sovereignty over Ladakh. Besides a specific claim to Demchok (bde-mchhog/mahasukha or sambhara) was advanced by the Chinese on the strength of a statement attributed to the Kathog Lama. The statement, as per Chinese quotation, runs thus: I arrived on the 10th day of the second half of this month at the sacred place of the Guru-Lhari Karpo of Demchok-which is the boundary of the King of Tibet with the King of Ladakh". *Report of the Officials of the Governments of India and of the People's Republic of China on the Boundary Question* (New Delhi 1961), p CR-38. The Chinese officials added "The "Guru" referred to here is a term of respect for the Dalai Lama and "the sacred place of the Guru" means a territory of the Dalai Lama" and therefore claimed Demchok within Tibetan territory. (Ibid)

Demchok is a sacred place within the Hemis complex. The Hemis complex is very ancient (old Sects) and antedates considerably the Yellow Sect and the rise of the Dalai Lamas. Along with Hemis, Demchok is associated with the wanderings of Maha Guru Padmasambhava, also called Guru Rimpoche or simply Guru. The great Nyingma Lama from Ka-thog undoubtedly referred to Mahaguru Padmasambhava and would not use the epithet Guru for the Dalai Lama. There is no evidence that the Nyingma Lama had any initiation or wang (dbang) from the then

Dalai Lama. It is not customary for a Nyingma Lama, to describe a Dalai Lama to be his Guru without such special initiation.

The Chinese officials were aware of their weak contention or discovered the weakness of their contention later. In their own report, published nearly two years later and without any date of publication, the expressions "King of Tibet" and "King of Ladakh" are changed into "Rjewo of Tibet" and "Prince of Ladakh". *Report of the Officials of the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of India on the Boundary Question* (Peking n.d.), p 42. The expression King has the flavour of Austrian sovereign. "King of Ladakh" makes this king independent of the Dalai Lama and worse still "King of Tibet" reduces the Manchu sovereignty over Tibet. So *rjewo* (lord, master or ruler), one of the several titles of the Dalai Lama, is introduced on second thoughts.

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