

ON TIBETOLOGY *

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I feel extremely honoured to address this galaxy and at the same time have my own reasons of diffidence. Though not a scholar I have the honour to represent a subject—Tibetology—the importance of which is well known to you. I happen to be the President of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology of which I propose to speak a few words later.

Tibetology, that is, study of culture or cultures expressed through the medium of Po Key (Bod Sked=Tibetan language), is not confined to the geographical boundaries of Tibet only. Po Key, with variations of dialect, is spoken in many adjoining countries. In earlier days Po Key was the vehicle of the Doctrine of the Buddha in Mongolia. Till a hundred years ago Po Key was lingua franca in the eastern half of the mass of countries conventionally called Central Asia. The perimeter of Po Key thus indicates one of the many facets of Tibetology.

Po Key came into its own as the vehicle of the Buddha's message. I need not tell this gathering as to how Po Key came to preserve for posterity the treasures of Mahayana literature. As the repository of the sublime Doctrine of Nirvana and Sunyata, the humanitarianism of Bodhisattvavada and the canons of Buddhist iconography, Po Key has its own importance. The sacred collection Tanjur contains, besides works of strictly doctrinal interest, books on medicine, astrology, chemistry, poetry etc. If we add to this the associations of Tibetan culture with Indian, Iranian, Mongol and Han cultures Tibetology represents a variety of subjects each worthy of specialization.

As one interested in the promotion of Tibetology I consider this session of Oriental Congress in Russia very much in the fitness of things. Russian scholarship in Sanskrit and Tibetan

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studies is as ancient as it is profound. For more than a century now Leningrad is reported to have the largest Tibetan collection outside Tibetan speaking countries. Numerous Russian scholars have made worthy contributions to appreciation of Mahayana. I may however mention only two. The great scholar Stcherbatsky in making a thorough exploration into Mahayana, in Sanskrit as well as Tibetan texts, found it necessary to visit Mahayana monasteries in the highlands of Asia and live with the Lamas. This scholar who astounded the Western World by tracing anticipations of thought mechanics of Kant, Hegel and Bradley in the philosophy of Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu and Dharmakirti,¹ built a small Buddhist Temple in Leningrad. I should also mention our friend late lamented Dr. George Roerich whom we miss here so much today.

With these prefatory remarks I may speak on the problems of a Tibetologist. The very first difficulty which a Tibetologist faces is that of non-availability of literary data. Study in the Mahayana monasteries and educational establishments has all along been pursued in an exclusive manner, that is, the cultivation of literature and learning of the particular sect with which the establishment is concerned. Such sectarian study was necessary for the field was so great and so much had to be acquired both in literary and spiritual treasures that specialization, to choose a modern word, was rather obligatory. Meditation (Sgom) for instance could not be cultivated without being attached to a particular sect or master. But as a result of this tradition nowhere in Sikkim, Bhutan, Tibet, Nepal or Mongolia there is a single repository of literature pertaining to all sects and schools. Scholars from the outside world who spend a few months or at best a couple of years in a Mahayana monastery naturally form somewhat incomplete notions of Mahayana. The Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, opened in October 1958, by His Excellency Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, seeks to remove this deficiency. His Highness the Maharaja of Sikkim, whose patronage made the establishment of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology possible, has by a Charter incorporated the Institute into an autonomous body and has given us powers to collect books of all the sects. His Highness, himself a staunch and devout follower of the Nyingma tradition, desires us to hold aloft the lamp of the Freedom of Mind which is the special legacy of the Buddha. This is indeed the first time that in a public establishment under Government auspices anywhere in the Tibetan speaking countries books of different sects are being stored and preserved in one

repository. Lamas of different sects work in our Institute and speak from same platform. Modern, non-Tibetan speaking, scholars who come to consult our collection have the advantage of collaboration from Lamas of all sects. We do not claim that we have in two years built a complete collection representing all schools and sects. Book production in Tibet is not exactly the same as in other countries. Blocks of xylographs have to be located in different monasteries, requisite paper is to be supplied and then prints are obtained. This is quite a job in normal times. Even before we could get our first orders complied with unhappy events took place in Tibet. So for more than a year we have not been able to procure any books. With the turn of normal times, now in sight, we propose to request Government of India and Government of China for provision of facilities to visit monastic presses in Tibet.

Speaking of literary sources I need not tell you that even a complete bibliography of all printed works is not available. There are incomplete catalogues of different sects from printing establishments. But a long felt desideratum is a complete bibliography of all works, doctrinal and secular, in print or in manuscript. The Namgyal Institute of Tibetology has undertaken compilation of bibliography of printed works in the first instance.

Though good work has been done to bring to light many Tibetan works for about a century now, much has yet to be done. A considerable portion of the work done relates to Kanjur and Tanjur. There are other sacred collections which can be fruitfully studied. Rin Chen Ter Zod (Treasury of Revelations) which have not been studied so far may reveal many Agamas, Dharanis and other texts lost in India. The same is true of the collection which opens with Jam Gon.

For secular subjects literature of Tibet is very rich, a fact not much realized till recently. Sakya Kabum and Pao Tsug La Thengwa, for instance, contain much data for subjects like history and economy. PETECH has made a very happy beginning in this field.² Jam-Ling Gya-She, it is understood, is being printed and edited in University of Washington (Seattle).³ Good data may be available from Tibetan translation of Yuan Chwang's Travels. A systematic study of Chronicles and Annals is thus much needed. The result should be of use to students of Indolog and

Sinology also. Even Nam-Thars may yield data for history of other countries as TUCCI has so ably demonstrated from pilgrimages to Orgyan (Swat).⁴ A large part of Tibetan original works—that is, works not based on Indian or any other foreign sources—is in manuscript form. Studies in history and economy are primarily dependent on such original contributions. For an exploration of such material this Congress of Orientalists may form a team to visit monasteries in Tibet.

Tibetan literary and epigraphic data studied with similar Indian evidence may throw much light on the history of India. During the centuries following Harsha's death a number of Tibetan invasions are on record. But the chronology and extent of these invasions have yet to be settled. For one thing these were perhaps not expeditions for well-planned material gain. Tibetans, after conversion to Buddhism, looked upon India as the sacred land and a spirit of adventure stimulated them to reach Vajrasana and other sacred places in their own way. Indian records speak of Kambojas, identified by BANERJI and THOMAS with Tibetans,⁵ having ruled portions of Eastern India but not much of depredations. On the other hand a Kamboja ruler is said to have built a large and beautiful temple of Siva in Dinajpur.⁶

Literary sources are however not the only material with which Tibetology is concerned. Mahayana iconography and art provide a key not only to appreciation of doctrinal matter but also to a history of aesthetic ideas. Many contributions have been made particularly by BHATTACHARYYA, FOUCHER, GETTY, GORDON, JISL, ROERICH and TUCCI.⁷ Even then a vast field remains unexplored. I should diffidently suggest a comparative study of art objects countrywise: Indo-Nepalese, Mongol and Chinese besides pure Tibetan. This will reveal contributions of different countries. I may just refer to two or three peculiarities within my knowledge. Dorje (Vajra) and Phurpa (Kila) are instruments of Indian origin⁸ but the iconic representation Yab-Yum Dorje Phurpa provides subject of research.⁹ Jam-Yang (Manjusri) is generally depicted with sword of wisdom in right hand and the book (Prajna-Paramita) in left hand. We have in a painted scroll, done by a previous Gyalwa Karmapa (1670 A. C.), Jam-Yang holding in two hands a pair of Wheels of Law. This is unique but not against canon. In Sadhanamala such representation is also prescribed.¹⁰ This Thangka with distinct Chinese influence is however the only such instance

known to us. Tara (Drolma) images in Tibet, Sikkim or Bhutan are generally after Indo-Nepalese patterns. There is however a Chinese Tara (Gya-nag Drolma) also popular in Tibet. Is it from Maha Cheena? ¹¹ These are just a few points I submit to the consideration of scholars.

Speaking of the provenance of the images I may say that some of the finest sculptors were not Buddhists. Exquisite works, strictly according to canon, came to Tibet and Mongolia from Turkestan and Eastern Europe. This is reminiscent of the historical fact that Mahayana had in earlier days prevailed in these places.¹² This matter besides being of interest to students of art is an evidence of active trade relations between Tibet and the West.

While speaking of fine arts one may notice the finding of an authority on Indian music that one of the Indian ragas, BHOTTARAGA, is not of classical Aryan origin but is an adaptation from a Tibetan chord.¹³ Is it a relic of Tibetan inroads into north India? Tibetan contributions to Indian culture may be recalled in the poetic words of TAGORE: "a river belonging to a country is not fed by its own waters alone. The Tibetan Bramhaputra is a tributary to the Indian Ganges."¹⁴

If I have stressed the utilization of Tibetan data for research in history or fine arts it is not that religion has been adequately studied. There are still many obscure chapters in our knowledge of religion. There is, for instance, a widely prevalent notion that Buddhism came to Tibet during the reign of Srongtsen Gampo. Srongtsen Gampo is indeed the Asoka or the Constantine of Tibet but it would be contrary to facts to say that Buddhism first entered Tibet under his auspices. There is firm evidence to hold that Buddhist scriptures and Buddhist scholars had been coming at least five generations earlier to Tibet. King Lha Tho-tho-ri who ruled about 150 years before Srongtsen Gampo could not use these scholars and their books because of lack of script. Nevertheless there was no lack of respect in the Royal House for the Noble Doctrine from India.¹⁵ It is however difficult to fix the date of first entry of Buddhism. In view of close contact between Tibet and India from very early days as evidenced in the field of mystic practices and meditation and in view of Asokan missionaries having preached both in the Himavats and the borderlands up to Khotan,¹⁶ it may not be surprising if we discover that Buddhism made its first

entry in Asoka's time either through Nepal or through Ladakh. Asoka in Tibetan tradition occupies a niche which is not enjoyed by any other foreign king.

I have no intention to tire you with a long address. I have taken the liberty to present some ideas for exploration by academicians. It is, however, not to be understood that Tibetology concerns only students of religion, art and history. It provides a rich field to students of linguistics, ethnology, science and sociology as well. With these words I should conclude with greetings on behalf of India where the Buddha was destined to be born and on behalf of Sikkim and the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology where we strive to preserve the lamp of the Freedom of Mind as lit by the Buddha.

NOTES

- 1 *Buddhist Logic* (Bibliotheca Buddhica, Leningrad 1930-32).
- 2 e.g. *Chronicles of Ladakh* (Calcutta 1939); *Missions of Bogle and Turner in Tibetan Texts : Young Pao* (1949-50); and *China and Tibet in early 18th Century* (Leiden 1950). Also noteworthy is Richardson : *Ancient Historical Edicts at Lasha* (London 1952).
- 3 Turrel Wylie.
- 4 *Travels of Tibetan Pilgrims to Swat Valley* (Calcutta 1940).
Memoirs : ASB V and Tibetan Texts Pt. I.
- 6 *Indian Antiquary* I and *JASB NS VII.*
- 7 Bhattacharyya : *Indian Buddhist Iconography* (Calcutta 1924 & 1958) ; Foucher : *L'Iconographie Bouddhique de l'Inde* (Paris 1900-5) and *Beginnings of Buddhist Art* (Oxford 1917) ; Getty : *Gods of Northern Buddhism* (Oxford 1914 & 1928) ; Gordon : *Iconography of Tibetan Lamaism* (New York 1939) ; Jisl : *Tibetan Art* (London 1959) ; Roerich : *Tibetan Paintings* (Paris 1952) ; Tucci : *Indo-Tibetica* (Rome 1932-41) and *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (Rome 1949).
- 8 Vajra of the shape of a peg was not unknown e.g. an exhibit from Java in British Museum. Evans-Wentz describes Phurpa as Tibetan. *Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation* (Oxford 1954).
- 9 Bhattacharyya obviously considers Dorje Phurpa as non-Indian. He does not notice this in *Indian Buddhist Iconography*. Roerich, Tucci and Nebesky (*Oracles and Demons of Tibet* Oxford 1956) render Dorje Phurpa as Vajrakila.
- 10 Bhattacharyya.
- 11 Re : Mahacheena, Woodroffe : *Shakti and Shakta* and Shastri : *Cult of Tara* (Memoirs ASI : 20) ; also Bagchi : *Studies in the Tantras* (Calcutta 1939).

- 12 e.g. Koeppen.
- 13 Swami Prajnanananda.
- 14 *The Centre of Indian Culture* (Visvabharati 1919).
- 15 Tibetan authorities (Theb Ter Ngon Po, Gya Po Yig Tsang etc.) allude to pre Srong-tsen Gampo events about Buddhism.
- 16 The border tribes mentioned in Asokan records might have spread even beyond Pamirs and Oxus. Barua: *Asoka and His Inscriptions* (Calcutta 1946 & 1955.)