ON TIBETOLOGY*

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I feel extremely honoured to address this galaxy and at the same time have my own reasons of difference. 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 humanitism, Bodhissattvavada and the canons of Buddhist iconography, Po Key has its own importance. The sacred collection Tantratcontains, 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, Persian, Mongol and Han 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 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 Svetozjasky in making a thorough exploration into Mahayana, in

*Address at the XXV International Congress of Orientalists (Moscow, 12 August 1966), previously published in the Proceedings (Moscow 1963).
Sanskrit and 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 anticipation of thought mechanics of Kant, Hegel and Bradley in the philosophy of Nagajuna, Vasubandhu and Dharmakirti, built a small Buddhist Temple in Leningrad. I should also mention our friend late lamented Dr. George Rovitch 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 bad to be acquired both in literary and spiritual treasures that specialization, to choose a modern word, was rather obligatory. Meditation (sogom) 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, Bhutia, Tibet, Nepal or Mongolia there is a single repository of literature pertaining to all sects and schools. Scholars from outside world who spend a few months or at best a couple of years in a Mahayana monastery naturally form somewhat incomplete notion 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 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 in 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 of collaboration from Lamas of all sects. We do not claim of collaboration from Lamas of all 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 compiled 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, row in sight we propose to request Government of India and Government of China for provision of facilities to visit monastic press in Tibet.
Speaking of literary sources I need not tell you that even a complete bib-
ilogy of all printed works is not available. There are incomplete catalogues of
different sets from printing establishments. But a long felt desideratum is a com-
plete 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, Dharmas and other texts lost in
India. The same is true of the collection which occurs with Jam Ges.

For secular subjects literature of Tibet is very rich, a fact not much realized
vill recently. Sakya Kabrup and Pao Tsug Lo Thrompa, for instance, contain much
data for subjects like history and economy. PETECH has made a very happy
beginning in this field. Jam Ling Gyatso-Shu, it is understood, is being printed and
edited in University of Washington (Seattle). Good data may be available from
Tibetan translation of Yuan Chwang's Travels. A systematic study of Chronicle
and Annals is thus much needed. The result should be of use to students of Indo-
ligion and Sinology also. Even Nara Thugs may yield data for history of other countries
as YULLC has so ably demonstrated from pilgrimages of Orgyen (Swat). 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 pri-
marily dependent on such original constructions. For an exploration of such ma-
terial this Congress of Orientalists may form a team to visit monasteries in Tibet.

Tibetan literature and epigraphic data studied with similar Indian evidence
may throw much light on the history of India. During the centuries following
Harshas'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 Bud-
dhism, looked upon India as the sacred land and a spirit of adventure stimulated
them to reach Vajrasana and other sacred place in their own way. Indian records
speak of Kambujas. Identified by BANERJI and THOMAS with Tibetans, having
ruled portions of Eastern India but not much of dependencies. On the other hand
a Kambuja river is said to have built a large and beautiful temple of Siva in Drapar.

Literary sources are however not the only material with which Tibetology
is concerned. Mahayana iconography and art provide a key not only to apprecia-
tion of doctrinal matter but also to a history of aesthetic ideas. Many contributions
have been made particularly by BHATTACHARYYA FOUCHER. GETTY.
GORDON J. JISL, ROERICH and TUCCI. Even then a vast field remains unexplored. I should differently suggest a comparative study of art objects country-wise: 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 (Kia) are instruments of Indian origin but the iconic representation Vajr-Yam Dorje Phurpa provides subject of research. Jam-Yang (Manjushri) 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 gywa Karma (1670 A.C.), Jam-Yang holding in his hands a pair of Wheels of Law. This is unique but not against canon. In southcentral such representation is also prescribed. This Thangka with distinct Chinese influence is however the only such instance known to us. Tam (Drolma) images in Tibet, Sikkim or Bhutan are generally after Indo-Nepalese patterns. There is however a Chinese Tara (Gu-yang Drolma) also popular in Tibet. It is from Maha Chenta: "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. 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 as an adaptation from a Tibetan chord. Is it a relic of Tibetan introds into north India? Tibetan contributions to Indian culture may be recalled in the poetic world of Tagore: "a river belonging to a country is not fed by its own waters alone. The Tibetan Brahmaputra is a tributary to the Indian Ganges."

If I have stressed the utilization of Tibetan data for research is history of fine arts it is not that religion has been adequately studied. There are still many obscurity chapters in our knowledge of religion. There is, for instance, a widely prevalent notion that Buddhism came to Tibet during the reign of Songtsen Gampo. Songtsen Gampo is indeed the Aoka or the Constantine of Tibet but it would be contrary 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 Songtsen 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. It is however difficult to fix the date of first entry of Buddhism. In view of these contact between Tibet and Indi
From very early days as condensations in the field of mystic practices and meditation and in view of Asoka as having preached both the Hinayana and the borderlands up to Khotan, 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 give you 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 Siddhartha 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 (St. Petersburg, 1790–92).

2.  e.g. Chronicles of Ladakh (Calcutta, 1979); Mission of Bogle and Turner in Tibetan Texts: Tsong Pao (1940–50) and China and Tibet in Early 18th Century (Leiden 1951). Also noteworthy is Richardson: Ancient Historical Studies and Laszlo (London 1972).

3.  Turrel Wyhe.


5.  Indian Antiquity, I and Jai NS VII.


7.  Vaja of the shape of a peg was not unknown e.g. an exhibit from Java in British Museum. Evans-Wettu describes Phurpa in Tibetan. Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation (Oxford 1946).

8.  Bhattacharyya obviously considers Dorje Phurpa as non-Indian. He does not notice this in Indian Buddhist Iconography. Roesch, Tucci and Nebesky (Praches and Domains of Tibet Oxford 1955) render Dorje Phurpa as Vajrakila.

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12. e.g. Xeeppon.


14. The Centre of Indian Culture (Vivabharati 1919).

15. Tibetan authorities (Theb. Ter Ngon po, Oya Po Yig Tsang etc.) allude to pre-Srong- tian Gampo events about Buddhism.

16. The border tribes mentioned in ancient records might have spread even beyond Pamirs and Orus. Barua: Asoka and His Inscriptions (Calcutta 1946 & 1955).