

CHALLENGING CENTRAL TIBET'S DOMINANCE OF HISTORY: THE *OCEANIC BOOK*, A 19TH-CENTURY POLITICO-RELIGIOUS GEOGRAPHIC HISTORY

GRAY TUTTLE

This article considers how the northeastern part of the Tibetan plateau, called A mdo (now in Qinghai, Gansu, and northern Sichuan) came to be seen as part of Tibet, focusing mainly on a mid-nineteenth-century text but also examining pre-modern sources.¹ Explicitly geographic texts dealing in detail with most of the territory of what we now consider Tibet only date from the eighteenth century.² These relatively late geographic sources share a distinctively early modern conception of a plateau-wide Tibetan region, and are quite different from earlier histories of 'Tibet,' which tended to pay little attention to most of eastern Tibet. But rather than merely focusing on such texts, I have expanded my focus to include all historical works that are dominated by any suggestion of 'cartographic' narratives. By this I mean texts that focus on broad regions of Tibet and especially how particular regions are politically and religiously controlled. This is what Julia Thomas has called "the

¹ I want to thank the late Gene Smith, Dan Martin, Kurtis Schaeffer and Jann Ronis for all their bibliographic work on Tibetan histories, on which I have relied in this present study. For an introduction to Gene Smith's work see www.tbrc.org and Gene Smith 2001 *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Himalayan Plateau*. Kurtis R. Schaeffer (ed.) Boston: Wisdom Publications. For Dan Martin, see his 1997 *Tibetan Histories: A Bibliography of Tibetan-Language Historical Works*. London: Serindia Publications. Schaeffer and Ronis's work (formerly at THDL) is no longer available.

² By this I mean the regions of A mdo, Khams, and Central Tibet (from Mnga' ris through Gtsang and Dbus to Kong po). The largely uninhabited Byang thang does not figure prominently in any pre-twentieth-century Tibetan text as far as I know.

relationship between spatiality and politics.”³ In this way I can explore, as was the goal for the panel for which this paper was written, “deliberate literary attempts to build on past models (of identity, biographical literature, and geography) in concrete politically interested ways that were to have profound effects on the shape of Tibet down to the present.” For instance, did ‘Tibet’ (Bod, Bod yul, Bod ljongs) as it was traditionally conceived before the eighteenth century, really include Mdo smad (later called A mdo)? And if so, when did this inclusion begin? And what did Mdo smad (A mdo) mean over time? Has this geographic term, which covers such a huge part of the Tibetan cultural area today, designated the same place, the same territory, throughout its history? Asking these questions allows me to explore the tensions between traditional categories and constructions of Tibetan space and deliberate innovation in defining this space.

Comparing Tibet in the *Oceanic Book* to Earlier Visions of Tibet

This article focuses on the *Yul mdo smad kyī ljongs su thub bstan rin po che ji Itar dar ba’i tshul gsal bar brjod pa Deb ther rgya mtsho* written from the 1830s to 1865 by Brag dgon zhabs drung Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas (1800/1–1869).⁴ The full title can be translated as *The Oceanic Book, the Elucidation of*

³ Julia Thomas, cited in Marcia Yonemoto 2003. *Mapping Early Modern Japan: Space, Place, and Culture in the Tokugawa Period (1603–1868)*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 180n6.

⁴ I use the modern reprint edition: Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, Brag dgon zhabs drung 1987 [1865]. *Mdo smad chos ’byung*. Zi ling: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang (hereafter abbreviated as Brag dgon pa 1987). The first edition of this work was completed in 1833; it was enlarged in 1849, and supplemented in 1865. See Michael Aris 1989. *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives: A Study of Pemalingpa, 1450–1521, and the Sixth Dalai Lama, 1683–1706*. London; New York: Kegan Paul, 249. For previous studies of this text, see the extensive introduction and table of contents (outlining the entire text) to the PL 480 reprint of the text by Yon tan rgya mtsho: Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, Brag dgon Zhabs drung. 1974 [1865]. *Yul mdo smad*

How the Buddhist Teachings Spread in the Valleys of the Mdo smad Country. This work is often called the *A mdo chos 'byung* but this title is not found in the work itself.⁵ Brag dgon pa did use the term *A mdo* in his text but not, obviously, in the title. No doubt the ocean after which the author named his book was the *Mtsho sngon*, also known as Qinghai in Chinese and *Koko nor* in Mongolian, all having the same meaning: the Blue Ocean. I contrast this work with earlier accounts, especially works that Brag dgon pa cites in his bibliography as *deb ther* (books) in order to show his attempts to both build on and depart from previous past models in politically interested ways.⁶

This is a text that is obsessed with place, and it defines the territory of *A mdo* with incredible detail and geographic rigor. On first encounter, I understood this compact territorial description too much through the lens of nationalism that colors the world as we know it today. The political scientist Anthony Smith describes a compact territory as one of the key features of a nation. So I initially intended to explore this text for elements of some kind of proto-nationalism, as it seemed to me that attention to a well-defined territory

kyi ljongs su thub bstan rin po che ji ltar dar ba'i tshul gsal bar brjod pa Deb ther rgya mtsho: a history of the spread of Buddhism in Amdo. Edited, with a detailed introduction and analytical apparatus, by Yon tan rgya mtsho. Delhi: A lags 'Jam dbyangs and Wa shul Skal bzang Bstan pa. See also, Anne Chayet 2002. A propos de notations géographiques dans l'*A mdo chos 'byung*. In Henk Blezer (ed.). *Tibet, Past and Present*, Tibetan Studies I, Leiden: Brill, 247–62; and 2008. A propos l'usage des termes “nyin” et “srib” dans le *Mdo smad chos 'byung*. *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 14, 71–80.

⁵ I am very grateful to Gene Smith, those who input the text for the electronic version of the *Deb ther rgya mtsho*, and Joseph McClellan for paginating the electronic text input at the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center, as it has been invaluable for quickly searching the entire text for critical terms.

⁶ On the variants and origin of the word *deb ther*, as well its proper translation as book (and not annals) see: Leonard van der Kuijp 2006. On the composition and printings of the *Deb ther sngon po*. *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies* (3–4) [THDL #T2714], 4–5.

like this might suggest a growing sense of shared community that could have signaled a (proto-) national consciousness. I do think that this text challenges Lha sa-centric definitions of Tibetan territory, but it is not an A mdo nationalist challenge. Instead, following the work of Marcia Yonemoto in her *Mapping Early Modern Japan*, I am now less concerned about finding the rise of a modern ‘national’ consciousness. I think she is right to highlight Gellner’s assertion that “It is nationalism that engenders nations, and not the other way around.”⁷ It is safe to say that the twentieth century—and not the early nineteenth century—marked the arrival of the concept of nationalism in Tibet. So, following Gellner, before the concept of nationalism came to Tibetans, there is not likely to be much of a sense of a nation either. Although I do think that the modern concept of a community of nation-states was at work in shaping this account, I do not think that it had led as yet to even a proto-nationalism for this Tibetan author.

How then did modernity influence this text? The advent of world geographies available in the Tibetan language for the first time influenced Brag dgon pa to conceive of A mdo as a compact territorial entity. After all, lamas had assisted with the Jesuit-led efforts at mapping the Qing empire and its frontiers, as discussed by Lobsang Yangdon in this volume.⁸ But more importantly, as I will discuss below, Tibetan Buddhists started to write geographic texts that treated space not according to the stylized schematics of Indian tradition, but according to a conception of contiguous blocks of ethno-state territory.⁹ In contrast to the relatively short world geographies that seem to

⁷ Yonemoto 2003, 176–77.

⁸ I am not convinced that the lamas who assisted the Jesuits were indeed ethnic Tibetans, but this is a minor point, since the ethnic distinction between Mongol and Tibetan lamas would not have been a barrier to communication of the map-making efforts and results in any case.

⁹ On the first of these world geographies, see Matthew Kapstein 2011. Just where on Jambudvîpa are we? New geographic knowledge and old cosmological schemes in eighteenth-century Tibet. In Sheldon Pollock (ed.) *Forms of Knowledge in Early*

have influenced his work, Brag dgon zhabs drung keeps his focus tightly on Mdo smad/ A mdo. In fact, despite the fact that he covers only roughly one third of cultural Tibet, his is the largest (411 folios) geographically organized text in the entire corpus of Tibetan literature.

The *Deb ther rgya mtsho* opens with an introduction to Tibetan geography, covering all of cultural Tibet in about half of page. But Brag dgon zhabs drung complicates the picture of Tibet from the first page. Typical explanations of Tibet start with a simple tripartite divisions,¹⁰ but he adds a fourth. The map (Figure 1) follows the narrative of text, in moving from left to right, illustrating how this text organizes the Tibetan world.¹¹ Brag dgon pa's general explanation of the Tibetan country divides cultural Tibet into 1) the three Circuits of upper Mnga' ris (*stod mnga' ris skor gsum*), 2) the middle Four Horns of Central Tibet (*bar dbus gtsang ru bzhi*), 3) Six Ranges of Mdo khams in Middle Khams (*mdo khams sgang drug . . . bar khams*), 4) Three Ranges (*sgang gsum*).

The first of these final three ranges is still considered part of Mdo khams, but the last two 'ranges' (they are actually called 'plains,' *thang*) are clearly set off from being part of Mdo khams. Only with a very superficial

Modern South Asia. Durham: Duke University Press. On the second of these world geographies, see the monographs on the parts of this work that describe Tibet and Europe, respectively, in: Turrell V. Wylie 1962. *The Geography of Tibet according to the 'Dzam-gling-rgya-bshad*. Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente; and Betty Carol Johnson 1972. *Europe according to the 'Dzam gling rgyas bshad*. M.A. thesis, University of Washington.

¹⁰ One important example of this can be found in Hugh Richardson 1998. The fifth Dalai Lama's decree appointing Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho as regent. In Michael Aris (ed.) *High Peaks, Pure Earth*. London: Serindia Publications, 442, 444, where the letter is addressed to all officials in the greater kingdom of Tibet: "[stod mnga' ris] skor gsum 2) [bar dbus gtsang] ru bzhi 3) [smad mdo khams] sgang drug ces bod chen po'i rgyal khams." Note that this division omits Amdo.

¹¹ Brag dgon pa 1987, 1.

reading could this be taken to be a typical breakdown of Tibet; with Mnga' ris in the upper or western regions, Dbus gtsang in the middle or central regions, and Mdo khams (somehow including the farther reaches of the Sgang gsum) in the lower or eastern regions.



Figure 1: The *Oceanic Book's* Mapping of Tibet

Moreover, normal expectations of Tibetan geography are complicated by two features. First, after describing the middle Four Horns of Dbus gtsang (there are two horns in each of these divisions of Central Tibet), Brag dgon pa interrupts the geographic narrative with a bit of historical narrative: he describes how Gushri Khan, the Mongol king who unified Tibet under his control in 1642, offered the fifth Dalai Lama only the thirteen myriarchies (*khri skor bcu gsum*) of this middle part of Tibet. While this might surprise Tibetan nationalists today, who frequently claim that the fifth Dalai Lama was 'offered' all of Tibet, the Dalai Lama's own 1643 Tibetan history is quite clear that Gushri Khan was

the ruler of Tibet: “he became king of the three parts of Tibet and set up the white umbrella of his laws on the peak of the world.”¹²

In any case, the insertion of this temporal narrative into the geography of Tibet is very relevant in the context of the history of A mdo, because it reminds the reader right away that A mdo fell outside the fifth Dalai Lama's realm of authority, as did Khams for that matter.¹³ Moreover, it sets the stage for the introduction of the narration of the Mongol royal lineage that descended from Gushri Khan, which was the ruling power in A mdo from 1638 to at least 1723.¹⁴

¹² Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, the fifth Dalai Lama of Tibet; Zahiruddin Ahmad, trans. 1995. *A History of Tibet by the Fifth Dalai Lama of Tibet*. Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 197. This text was written in 1643, a year after W. D. Shakabpa claimed that the fifth Dalai Lama was given “supreme authority over all Tibet from Tachienlu in the east to the Ladakh border in the west” (W.D. Shakabpa 1984. *Tibet: A Political History*. New York: Potala Publications, 111). On the evident tampering with the historical evidence in this passage, see Derek Maher's article in this collection, An examination of a critical appraisal of Tsepon Shakabpa's *One Hundred Thousand Moons*. One relatively early claim that Gushri Khan gave authority (“over all people”) to the fifth Dalai Lama in 1642 was articulated only after Gushri Khan had died in 1679. See Richardson 1998, 444.

¹³ For a nineteenth-century source that makes the same claim, see Peter Schweiger 1999. Towards a biography of Don yod rdo rje, king of Be ri. In Helmut Eimer, *et al.* (eds). *Studia Tibetica et Mongolica (Festschrift Manfred Taube)*. Swisttal-Odendorf: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, 259.

¹⁴ On the Koshot Mongols who ruled much of eastern Tibet from their base near the Blue Lake in A mdo, see Uyunbilig Borjigidai 2002. The Hoshuud polity in Khökhnuur (Kokonor). *Inner Asia* 4, 181–96.

Table 1: Tibet (*Bod yul*) in the *Deb ther rgya mtsho*¹⁵

1. Upper: Mnga' ris skor gsum (detailed breakdown omitted here)

2. Middle: Dbus gtsang ru bzhi (detailed breakdown omitted here)

[Temporal narrative inserted into geographic narrative:] Chos rgyal Gushri Khan gathered together the 13 myriarchies (*khri skor bcu gsum*) and offered them to the fifth Dalai Lama, consisting of the four: G.yas ru, G.yong ru, Sbus [*Dbus*] ru, Gung [*G.yon*] ru [i.e. limited to Central Tibet]

3. Mdo khams (including all Six Ranges & first of Three Ranges)

A. Mdo khams sgang drug (Six Ranges) :

1. Zal mo sgang
2. Tsha ba sgang
3. Smar khams sgang
4. Sbo 'bor sgang
5. Dmar rdza sgang
6. Mi nyag sgang

these are part of Bar khams (Middle Khams [= Khams today])

B. Sgang gsum (Three Ranges):

1. in Mdo khams: the realm (khams) called Smar khams

[4. A mdo?]

2. in Mdo smad: the realm (khams) called G.yer mo thang
3. in Tsong kha: the realm (khams) called Gyi thang

¹⁵ I am uncertain about the outer boundaries of parts of Mnga' ris (such as Li (Khotan), and other difficult to localize places such as Zhang Zhung and Bru sha), which I have indicated by the fainter red color. I should say at the outset that these maps are only meant to give the roughest outlines of these regions. None of these texts provide map illustrations, so I am constructing maps from their verbal descriptions only. They are only intended as a general orientation to the terms and regions discussed in texts. Since I am usually only working from the most vague sense of a location or a limited set of data points, the accuracy of all the maps in this paper should not be assumed. Moreover, I welcome additional information that will improve my knowledge of Tibetan territorial divisions, as this is a largely undeveloped field.

The second break from the conventional geographic divisions of Tibet concerns the confusion about where the third part of Tibet (the lower part, *smad*) actually starts. This is because the term for the third, that is lower (*smad*) part of the usual tripartite division of Tibet into Upper, Middle and Lower parts is not mentioned (unless it is to be found in the term Mdo smad, but this is simply a place name in its own right). The Six Ranges of Mdo khams are associated with regions we now call simply Khams, and do not include any place names now found in A mdo. Instead, the Six Ranges (Sgang drug) are described as being part of Bar (Middle) Khams. Possibly from the perspective of someone in the most northeastern part of Tibet, near Bla brang monastery in A mdo, it may have seemed strange to include the highlands of Khams between his home and Central Tibet as the lower or eastern part of Tibet. Were the Sgang drug then considered part of the 'middle' division of Tibet, more closely affiliated with Central Tibet (Dbus gtsang)? This was certainly true of Khams in the twentieth century, so it is hardly surprising to find a hint of this association in the middle of the nineteenth.

In any case, in trying to determine where A mdo (or Mdo smad) is located within the greater Tibetan world, it is only the additional Three Ranges that must be examined here. Of these, the first is Smar khams, which I take to mean what is now the seat of Rnga ba Prefecture (Ch. Maerkang, Tib. 'Bar khams/Smar khams), because the Smar khams to the south (now in Chab mdo prefecture) is described as being one of the Six Ranges (Smar khams sgang). The Six Ranges and Mar khams in the Three Ranges are described as being in Mdo khams (divided from the rest of eastern Tibet by a grey line on the map), while in what we now think of as being the A mdo region are only the latter two 'ranges' of the Three Ranges: G.yer mo thang in Mdo smad and Gyi thang in Tsong kha.¹⁶ From this division it is clear that, at least at this time, Mdo

¹⁶The first of these places, G.yer mo thang is difficult to localize. Various sources place it 1) to the east of Bla brang monastery (in sources where Shing kun [Ch. Lintao] is described as being in G.yer mo thang), 2) around the Blue Lake (Mtsho sngon, Koko nor), such as the area to the west of the lake, labeled Yamotang 耶摩塘 in the Yuan

smad (which has been associated with far northeastern Tibet from at least imperial Tibetan times)¹⁷ did not include southern Rnga ba prefecture, at least

period, see Tan Qixiang (ed.) 1996 [1982] *Zhongguo li shi di tu ji*. Vol. 7 (Yuan Ming shi qi). Beijing: Zhongguo ditu chubanshe, 21. For the latter location, see also R. A. Stein 1972 *Tibetan Civilization*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 6. Following the narrative logic, which has listed places in contiguous order, in this text G.yer mo thang should be located between Smar khams and Tsong kha. I think that this confirms the association between Shing kun as Lintao and G.yer/ Dbyar mo thang. For more on the location of Dbyar mo thang, see Helga Uebach 1991, Dbyar-mo-thang and Gong-bu ma-ru. Tibetan historiographical tradition of the treaty of 821/823. *Tibetan History and Language: Studies Dedicated to Uray Géza on his Seventieth Birthday*. Ernest Steinkellner, ed. Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 497–526. The note on this term in the Chinese translation of this text states simply that this is an old name for Mdo smad, see Gongquehudanbaraoji, Zhiguanba; Wu Jun, Mao Jizu, and Ma Shilin, trans. 1989. *Anduo zheng jiao shi*. Lanzhou: Gansu sheng minzu chubanshe, 4. The last word on this toponym, and one that takes into consideration all the earlier material and new findings is that of Matthew Kapstein, who concludes that the term was applied broadly throughout the region we now call A mdo, with the exception of the Tsong kha Valley; Matthew Kapstein 2009. The treaty temple of the Turquoise Grove. In Matthew Kapstein (ed.) *Buddhism between China and Tibet*. Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism Series. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

¹⁷ For references to Mdo smad as being located in this region in imperial times, see F.W. Thomas 1955. *Tibetan Literary Texts and Documents Concerning Chinese Turkestan Part III*, London: Luzac & Co. 17n282. As late as the end of the seventeenth century, Mdo smad was clearly associated with Tsong kha and Co ne; see Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, Sde srid 1989 [1698]. *Dga' ldan chos 'byung beedurya ser po*. Rdo rje rgyal po (ed.) Pe cin: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang. A correspondence between Mdo smad and what we now call Khams seems to have been introduced in the late nineteenth or twentieth century, as demonstrated in Melvyn Goldstein (ed.) 2001. *The New Tibetan-English Dictionary of Modern Tibetan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 570. Possibly this reflects a modern Lha sa-centric view of eastern Tibet.

not the parts south of the Rma River watershed, such as Smar khams.¹⁸ Moreover, this formulation must be read as a strong suggestion that the present interpretation of Mdo khams as being an abbreviation for the two distinct regions of A mdo and Khams together was certainly not the case in mid-nineteenth-century A mdo usage, if in fact it has any historic validity. My point is that here the typical tripartite division of Tibet—Mnga' ris, Dbus gtsang and Mdo khams—seems not to include A mdo at all. Instead, this latter region seems to have been tacked on in a rather hodge-podge way at the end of this geographic narrative. In the next few lines, the text does directly address the term 'A mdo' by describing where the term comes from as well as where A mdo begins: (north) east of the Bayan Khara (Tib. Ba yan ha ra) Range in the upper reaches of the Rma river's headwaters.¹⁹

This focus on A mdo is followed by another division of Tibetan territory into the three *chol kha* (divisions), another typical tripartite division of Tibet. Here too, I have mapped the mere six lines of text onto a modern map (Figure 2), which again is narrated from left to right, following the text, so that each successive division of Tibet is described in reference to the previous one.

¹⁸ Modern understandings of A mdo tend to include all the regions in which variants of the A mdo dialect are spoken (which includes Gser thar/rta County in Dkar mdzes Prefecture as well as much of Rnga ba Prefecture in Sichuan), with large portions of regions traditionally dominated by Mongols (such as Dulan and the Tsaidam basin) usually included as well. It also includes Co ne, where the Tibetans speak a variant of the Lha sa dialect. Although the Mgo log speak an A mdo dialect, they do not always (ever?) consider their region to be part of A mdo; personal communication, Tulku Thondup. And though the Rgyal mo rong regions of southeast Rnga ba prefecture are characterised by a distinct language, the region is sometimes included on maps as part of A mdo.

¹⁹ Brag dgon pa 1987, 2.



Figure 2: The *Oceanic Book*'s Tripartite Division of Tibet

Note that in this description of Tibet, the beginning of the first division (*chol kha*) says simply “from Mnga’ ris Gung thang.” Whether this indicates that Mnga’ ris and Gung thang should be included in the first division is unclear. It might indicate instead that only Gung thang (in Mnga’ ris) is meant to be included in the first division. Finally, it might mean that the first division of Tibet should start at the outer (eastern) edge of Mnga’ ris Gung thang, in which case most of (western) Mnga’ ris is dropped entirely from these divisions of Tibet. As I was unsure of how to read this, the lighter shading for Mnga’ ris indicates my lack of clarity on this point.²⁰

²⁰ The exact location of the eastern border of the first division is also difficult to pinpoint. The Brag dgon pa gives Sog la skya bo as the border of the Dbus gtsang and Stod khams divisions. This might be near Sog rdzong or Sog gzhung (for these locations see: <http://thlib.org/places/>). On the basis of the recurrence of the term “Sog” in all these names, I somewhat arbitrarily have marked the dividing point as falling somewhere north of the Dngul chu (Salween) River and south of the present Tibetan Autonomous Region border, near where several modern-day place names with the term “Sog” in them are found. Since the indications of boundaries in the text are minimal,

My impression, however, is that the latter formulation is the correct one. By this point in Tibet's history, the importance of Mnga' ris as a current source of religious influence had almost vanished in significance, especially after the Jungar Mongols wreaked havoc in the region in the early eighteenth century. From the late-nineteenth-century travel accounts of both Indian pundits exploring Tibet (on the behalf of the British) and European explorers, this region was indeed sparsely populated. In fact, the entire focus of Tibetan geography, like the balance of population at this time, had shifted to the east.

It is easy to recognize this tripartite view of Tibet, because it accords with the contemporary divisions of Tibet into Central Tibet, Khams and A mdo. However, this modern breakdown of Tibet is not commonly found to be synonymous with earlier tripartite divisions of Tibet, such as the divisions in the Sa skya-Mongol period. The earliest versions of the three *chol kha* were a product of the 1268 census the Mongols took of Tibet. This should not be surprising, since the term *chol kha* is a loan word from Mongol (Mongol *colge*, corresponding to Chinese *lu*, meaning 'circuit'). This 1268 census had described the three divisions of Tibet as Mnga' ris skor gsum, Gtsang, and Dbus.²¹ By the time Brag dgon pa wrote his text, the three divisions seem to be consistently understood to be Central Tibet, Mdo stod and Mdo smad.

especially with regard to the extent to how far these divisions extend to the east, I have colored the map to reflect our present understandings of regional divisions. As noted above, much of the region of present-day Rnga ba Prefecture in northern Sichuan appears not be included in Mdo smad. This particularly applies to the parts of Rnga ba that are far from the banks the Rma River, such the Rgyal mo rong regions that are part of a different watershed. Whether these regions should be considered part of Mdo stod is an open question.

²¹ According to Petech the census boundaries were as follows: "the survey of Gtsang, from Mnga' ris to Zha lu" and for "Dbus, from Zha lu to 'Bri gung" (see Luciano Petech 1980. *The Mongol census in Tibet*. In M. Aris and Aung San Suu Kyi (eds) *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson*. Warminster, UK: Aris & Philips, 234. The later extension of these three divisions to mean 1) Central Tibet (Mnga' ris, Dbus

After a long list of the works consulted by Brag dgon pa—one of the most complete lists of Tibetan historical literature ever written—the text moves on to a summary treatment of the general explanation of the way the teachings spread in Mdo smad.²² In this short account—as with most religious histories—temporal concerns outweigh geographic ones. So the first arrival of Buddhism in A mdo and its gradual spread, described chronologically, determines the organization of this eleven page section. This is a pattern with which historians are familiar and comfortable: you start at the beginning of the events you are narrating and move forward through time. And it is a pattern that persists for the most part in the next chapter as well, where Brag dgon pa introduces the Koko nor Mongol Principalities in another twenty-six pages, listing the various Mongol royal lineages that had dominated Mdo smad for the past three hundred years. Thus, for nearly fifty pages, temporal order trumps geography (marked by the dashed line in Table 2, below). But in the *Deb ther rgya mtsho*, the brevity of this kind of history only serves as a foil to the fact that most of the text—the next 300 pages, to be discussed in more detail below—is not organized in a temporally linear narrative. Instead the text is organized in a geographically linear narrative, moving from the northwest to the southeast. The only other major exception to this rule is the guide to Bla brang monastery and its colleges' abbatial successions, in the second volume.

I want to explain the significance of these two major instances of temporally linear narrative dominating the text. I have highlighted these two instances (II & III) by underlining them in the table of contents, because these two entities—1) the Mongol Principalities and 2) the Bla brang Monastic Hierarchs—are set apart in this way for political reasons: they dominate A mdo history and territory. (See Table 2 on the following page.) In this division, we

and Gtsang), 2) Khams and 3) A mdo does not seem relevant for the Mongol period, despite assertions to the contrary in late Sa skya sources, as well as more recent nationalist histories of Tibet.

²² Brag dgon pa 1987, 3: Mdo smad ljongs su bstan pa'i srol dar tshul las btsams spyir bshad pa.

can see traditional Tibetan historiographic and cultural patterns. First, there is the obvious pattern of the joining of politics and religion (*chos srid zung 'drel*) represented by the political patrons of the Mongol princely lines and their Tibetan Buddhist 'priests,' the abbots of the great religious community of Bla brang. A Mongol prince in fact had been the key sponsor of Bla brang monastery in its earliest days, and his family remained steadfast (if gradually less effective) sponsors until the twentieth century. Yet by the time this text was written, the political power of these Mongol princes had almost entirely disappeared. Matthieu Ricard, in an appendix to his translation of Zhabs dkar's biography has described this gradual weakening in great detail, but suffice it to say here that the Mongols' strength was finished by the 1830s.²³ The Mongols, for all their former glory, had faded from political importance when Brag dgon pa started to write his history.

And in this respect, we see another similar pattern to Central Tibetan historiography: that is, the royal lineage that sponsored Buddhism is still important even after that lineage has ceased to be a major support for Buddhist institutions. The story of the Tibetan emperors' support for Central Tibet's

²³ See Shabkar Tsogdruk Rangdrol; Matthieu Ricard, Jakob Leschly, Erik Schmidt, Marilyn Silverstone, and Lodrö Palmo, trans.; Edited by Constance Wilkinson with Michal Abrams. 1994. *The Life of Shabkar: The Autobiography of a Tibetan Yogi*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 565–67. Paul Nietupski. 2011 *Labrang Monastery: A Tibetan Buddhist Community on the Inner Asian Borderlands, 1709-1958*. Lanham MD: Lexington Books; Li An-che 1994. *History of Tibetan Religion: A Study in the Field*. Beijing: New World Press, 140–42; Borjigidai 2002; Christopher Atwood 2004. *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*. New York: Facts on File, 573–76.

Table 2: Outline of the Standard Historical Portion of the *Oceanic Book*

[Volume 1]

[Introductory Materials]

- 1) General explanation: the country-realm of Tibet (*Bod kyi yul khams*)
- 2) Bibliography of sources consulted
- 3) General explanation of how the Buddhist teachings spread in the Valleys of the Mdo smad Country (*Yul mdo smad ljongs*)

I. Explanation of the history of the Koko nor Principalities (*Mtsho sngon dpon khag*)

< —end of temporal narrative/ start of geographic narrative— >

- 1) Explanation of the north bank of the Tsong River (Ch. *Huangshui*)
- 2) Explanation of south bank of the Tsong River and north bank of the Rma (Yellow) River
- 3) Explanation of the south bank of the upper [Rma River]: Rma stod, Mgo log, etc.
- 4) Explanation of the lower Rma River: Khri ka, etc.
- 5) Explanation of the Dgu River [Reb gong], etc.

{this part was finished 1849, but the text was later expanded to include:}

[Volume 2]

II. Guide to & Abbatial Succession of the Great Religious Community of [Bla brang] 'Bkra shis khyil

[Volume 3]

Guide to the majority of monasteries from the Six Kha gya Tribes up to Rgyal mo tsa ba rong, recorded as a mere list

- 1) Explanation of the southern and northern banks of the Bsang (Ch. Xia) River & the six Kha gya tribes
- 2) Explanation of the northern bank of the Klu (Ch. Tao) River
- 3) Explanation of the southern bank of the Klu (Ch. Tao) River
- 4) Explanation of the Rnga River, the Rwa Gorge, the Tsa River, and the Great River (Chu chen, Ch. Jinchuan)

Buddhist monasteries and monks persisted, and even grew larger, as an element of Tibetan religious history over time. So, in a sense, these Mongol princes seem to stand in for the Tibetan emperors in this historiographic pattern, because A mdo had been largely omitted from Tibetan histories of imperial Tibetan support for Buddhist institutions in their region. Lacking Dunhuang's precious archives, they had not been able to piece together the details of Imperial Tibet's support for Buddhist colleges in the area.²⁴ A mdo needed a more immediate exemplar of royal patrons in any case.

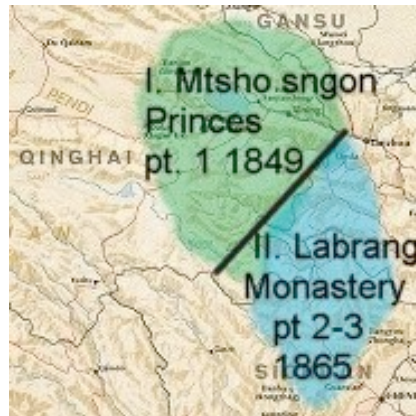


Figure 3: Territorial coverage of divisions of the *Oceanic Book*

The rise of Mdo smad to prominence had been coincident with the rise of these Mongol princes' political power, so Brag dgon pa narrates the history of the Mongol princely lineages and then goes on to introduce the domain over which they ruled in their glory days, in five sections. He starts in the north, where the Mongol princes had sponsored the influential Dgon lung monastery, seat of the Lcang skya, Thu'u bkwan, and Chu bzang incarnations, and moves south to describe the Tsong kha and Mgo log regions, as well as the lower Rma

²⁴ Helga Uebach 1990. On dharma-colleges and their teachers in the ninth-century Tibetan empire. In Paolo Daffinà (ed.) *Indo-Sino-Tibetica: Studi in Onore di Luciano Petech*. Roma: Bardi Editore, 393–418.

River valley communities of Khri kha and Reb gong. The end of the first volume marks as well a political boundary, one that is almost mirrored in the current divide between Qinghai and Gansu provinces. In fact, it marks the limit of control of the most recent power to rise in A mdo: Bla brang monastery.

I have tried here to illustrate (Figure. 3) the parallel structure of the second part of this work, written after 1849, at the encouragement of Brag dgon pa's local colleagues. This second part, consisting of a further two volumes, relates the history of Bla brang monastery in a manner that closely parallels that of the Mongol princes (the two underlined headings with Roman numerals in Table 2). By the mid-1800s, Bla brang had become a major political power in the region and thus the successive abbots of the monastery were the power-brokers of this new political institution.²⁵ The abbots of the various colleges of the monastery might be compared to the collateral lines of Mongol principalities. I also want to point out the similarity in the way that territory is described as dependent on the two main divisions of power in the *Deb ther rgya mtsho*: that is, the dominant powers in the north (Mongol princes) and south (Bla brang hierarchs) of A mdo and the sequential treatment of their respective subject territories (the entries with Arabic numerals, under each of the larger headings, in Table 2). After the Mongol principalities based in the north are described, the areas over which they had influence are narrated in five geographic divisions. After Bla brang monastery and its colleges in the south are described, the areas over which they had influence are narrated in four geographic divisions. In both cases, the amount of influence that these respective powers wielded declined the farther away in space (and in the narrative) one moved.

Historiographic Models for the *Deb ther rgya mtsho*

For the remainder of this paper, I examine the historiographic and modern influences that are obvious in the *Deb ther rgya mtsho*. From his extensive

²⁵ Nietupski, 2011.

bibliography we can see that Brag dgon pa read most of the available literature on Tibetan history. These included several types that had an obvious influence on the way he wrote his own text:

- royal lineages (*rgyal rabs*): model for the section on Mongol Principalities
- abbatial successions (*gdan rabs*): model for the section on Bla brang Monastery
- ancestral lineages of nobility (*gdung rabs*): none in A mdo at the time
- incarnational lineages (*gser 'phreng*): the incarnations associated with each monastery are included under the particular monastery's description
- religious histories (*chos 'byung*): major influences, especially the new versions of religious histories such as the *Golden Beryl* & new *chos 'byung* by Mongols
- world geographies (*'dzam gling bshad*): early modern geographic surveys
- historical “books” (*deb ther*): after which he most explicitly modeled his account, and which I will discuss shortly.

First, I want to address the latter categories of the innovative religious histories (*chos 'byung*) and world geographies, which were mostly written by Mongols. Up until 1698, the Tibetan *chos 'byung* had failed to include much information about Mdo smad. At most, they only included information about men born in Mdo smad who were influential in Central Tibet (like Tsong kha pa) or relevant to the return of the Buddhist vinaya tradition to Central Tibet after the fall of the Tibetan empire. That is, they briefly mentioned the three wise men (*mkhas pa gsum*) who fled to Mdo smad and passed their vinaya tradition on to Gong pa rab gsel, who transmitted it on to men from Central Tibet, who returned with the tradition intact. Thus, the only part of Mdo smad history that was deemed worthy of inclusion in the meta-narratives of religious

history written by Central Tibetans from the twelfth to the eighteenth centuries was the history that happened to be relevant to Central Tibet.

Before describing how different the *Deb ther rgya mtsho* is from previous texts, I will first introduce the texts to which I am comparing it. I ignore here the earliest Tibetan annals that were only recovered from Dunhuang in the twentieth century, since Brag dgon zhabs drung did not have access to these. Instead, I start with the early Tibetan histories (c. 1175–1362) especially the earliest religious histories (*chos 'byung*) which cover both India and imperial Tibet. I contrast these with what I am anachronistically calling here 'national' histories, which focus only on Central Tibet. When I use this term 'national' in this context, I am only making reference to that fact that these histories are limited to what we would now, today, call a single nation (later religious histories of India and China will also be designated in the same way), though in reality, they usually focused either on the dynasties that ruled the territory we now call a nation, or on the rise of the Buddhist religion in these ethno-regions. Nevertheless, the distinction between the trans-regional religious histories and these regional-centered political histories seemed relevant to me, and calling them 'national' is an anachronistic expedient. So, how is space handled in these early histories? There is little deliberate description of space, with terms like India, China and Tibet apparently treated as self-evident. But when one looks for actual place names or considers where the individuals described lived, the space covered by these texts is remarkably limited. In the case of Tibet, it is limited to a narrow band of inhabited valleys just to the north of the Himalayan mountains, what we now call Central Tibet. The one exception to this is that in the religious histories (*chos 'byung*) some attention is paid to eastern Tibet. In the list of the temples built to pin down the demoness, an event attributed to Tibet's imperial period when Buddhism was being introduced, only one temple is listed as being in eastern Tibet (what is

now Khams).²⁶ But more importantly, the vinaya tradition of Tibet that was preserved by the three wise men (*mkhas pa gsum*) who fled via Mnga' ris and Hor yul (the Uighur khanate in what is now Xinjiang) to Mdo smad, is marked with a yellow line in Figure 4.

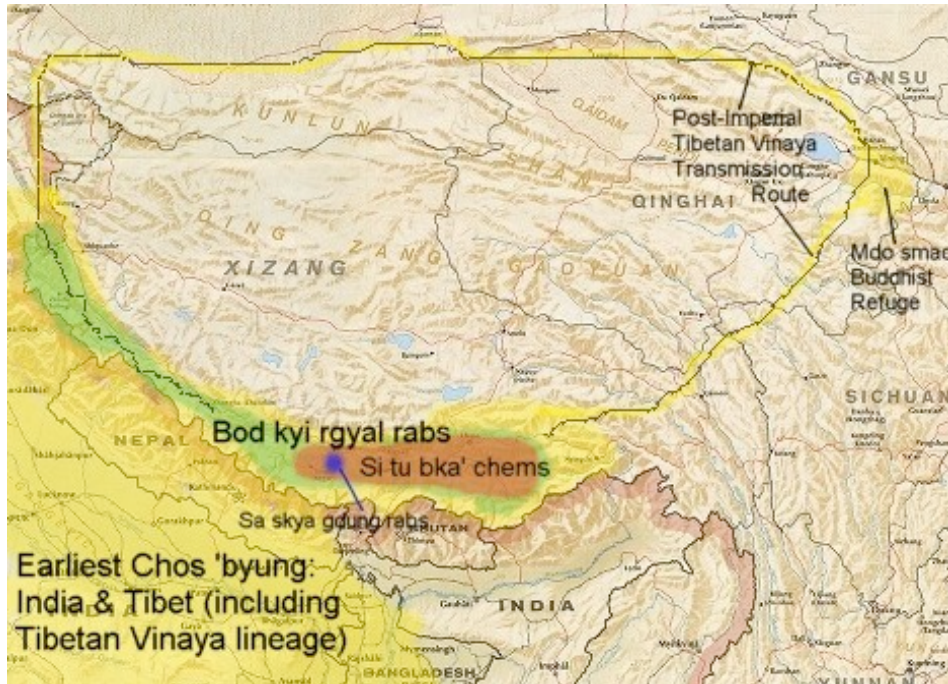


Figure 4: Early Tibetan Histories (c. 1175–1362)²⁷

²⁶ Janet Gyatso 1987. Down with the Demoness: Reflections on a Feminine Ground in Tibet. In Janice Willis (ed.) *Feminine Ground: Essays on Women and Tibet*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion. 33–56; Robert J. Miller 1998. The Supine Demoness and the Consolidation of an Empire. *The Tibet Journal*, 23(3), 3–23.

²⁷ I include the following sources in this analysis: five *Chos 'byung*, those written by: 1) Nyang rel c. 1175; 2) Lde'u c. 1250; 3) Mkhas pa lde'u c. 1275; 4) Bu ston 1322; 5) Klong chen 1362. The coverages of these five *Chos 'byung* are indicated by yellow; Two 'national' histories that share the same title: *Bod kyi rgyal rabs* written by Grags pa rgyal msthan and 'Phags pa 1275. The coverages of these three are indicated by green; The third source is the *Si tu bka' chems* 1350. The coverage of this source is

Thus, these outlying regions that we now think of as part of Tibet were only included in this account because they were necessary to the narrative of what happened in Central Tibet—the return of the vinaya tradition in the Second Propagation, completing the clockwise circle of the yellow line on the map. Mnga' ris likewise figures most commonly into these religious historical narratives as a place from which the Second Propagation of Buddhism spread from India into Central Tibet. However, in what I am calling the “national” histories, neither eastern nor western Tibet plays a significant role. For these political accounts, written as they were by the prime wielders of power in the traditional center of Tibetan culture (Dbus gtsang), interest was focused solely on who had held power there in the past, probably as a sign of the legitimacy having passed to the authors of these new texts. So in this earliest period of Tibetan historiography, up to 1362, eastern and western Tibet (Khams/Mdo smad and Mnga' ris) played only a tangential role in Tibetan religious history, as source for the restoration of the Buddhist religion (and not of political importance). I only note the arising of the first local histories, of Sa skya, to demonstrate the close connection between the advent of local history and the holding of political power. This is a trend that we will see continue throughout Tibetan history.

The next hundred years of historical writing were marked by a sharp break from the past attention only to Indian and Tibetan history. With the arrival of the *Rgya nag deb ther*, an annalistic history of China, we see a new model for Tibetan history, as evidenced by 'Tshal pa Kun dga' rdo rje's *Deb ther dmar po*. This first instance of a Tibetan *deb ther*, using this foreign word for 'book,' as well as Bsod nams rgyal mtshan's famous *Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, is marked by a great attention to dynastic lineages. In these two accounts, the Chinese, Mi nyag (Xixia), and Mongolian royal lineages interrupt

indicated by brown; Finally, the location of the first local histories: *Sa skya gdung rabs*, thirteenth to fourteenth centuries, which exist in many versions, is indicated by a blue dot.

the earlier narratives, which had proceeded directly from Indian to Tibetan royal lineages. Tibetan royal lineage is now narrated not directly after that of India, but follows a circuitous narrative, from 1) India, to 2) China, through 3) Minyag and 4) Mongol royal lineages, before Brag dgon pa discusses 5) Tibetan royalty (see Figure 5).

These texts came *after* the end of over a century of occupation of Tibet by the Mongols and indicate the influence that this integration into the Mongol empire had had on Tibet. Moreover, the authority of these writers and the institutions they represented had flowed from the Mongols, and this prestige lingered on even after the Mongols were driven from Tibet and China.

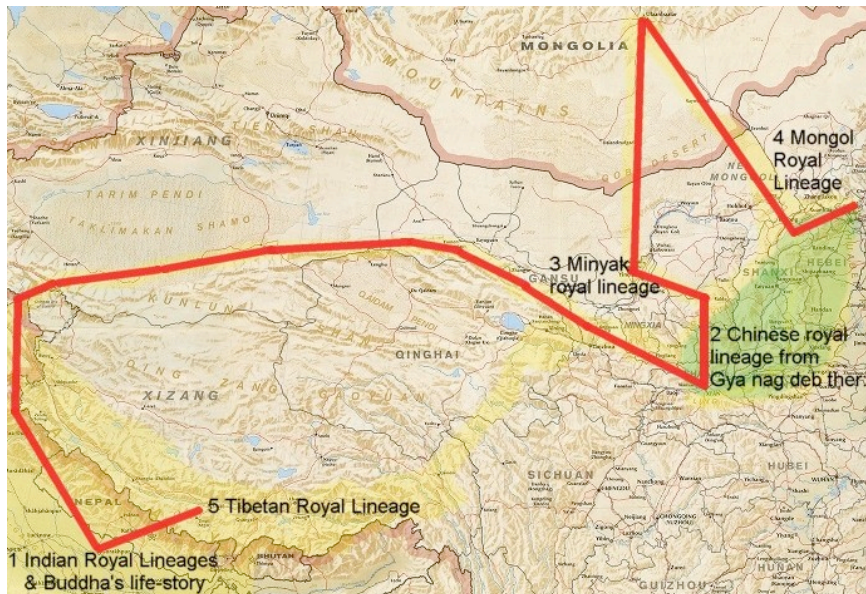


Figure 5: Expanded and Sectarian Religious Histories (1365–1450)²⁸

²⁸ The now non-extant *Rgya nag deb ther* served as source for what I am calling these expanded (in terms of dynastic lineages covered) religious histories: 1) *Deb ther dmar po* 1363, 2) *Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* 1368. The narrative timeline is shown in red. The *Rgya Bod yig tshang* 1434 narrative proceeded as follows: India, Khotan, China, Mi nyag, Tibet, Mongolia, marking it as a transitional form of biography between this period and the next.

Thus, the earlier Tibetan historical narrative was re-written, and for this period, accommodated itself to the larger Asian historical narrative, which is what I mean by expanded religious histories. Tibetans rightly recognized that Buddhism had gone to China much earlier than Tibet, and had been supported by the dynasties there. And given that the source of Tibetan political legitimacy had been linked to China through the Mongol occupation of China, it made sense to continue the narrative along the lines of the various dynasties that had taken over from the Chinese, that is, the Mi nyag and the Mongols. Only at the end of this narrative was the history of the Tibetan royal lineage explained in detail, even though, *temporally*, this was out of sequence. Since power flowed from the east in this period, the Tibetan imperial narrative was likewise subordinated to these eastern royal lineages. The other major innovation at this time was the rise of sectarian religious histories, that is, histories dedicated to only one religious tradition (whether Bka' brgyud, Bon po, or Dge lugs).²⁹ Both of these forms of history (the expanded and the more narrow, sectarian, religious histories) were of course related to assertions of legitimacy and power.

With the fading of Mongol influence on Tibet after another hundred years, Tibetan historians re-aligned the historical narrative to place the Tibetan royal lineage back in a direct line with Indian history (as indicated by the numbered order of the narrative, illustrated on Figure 6). In both the *Deb ther sngon po* and the *Deb ther dmar po gsar ma*, the imperial Tibetan lineage followed immediately after the lists of Indian rulers, and only after that were the dynasties that ruled China listed. By this time, Mi nyag had been dropped from the list and the Ming dynasty was added, since they too supported Tibetan Buddhist hierarchs.

²⁹ The rise of sectarian religious histories is indicated by the following works, 1) *Chos 'byung mig 'byed 'od stong* (Bka' brgyud), early 1400s; 2) *Rgyal rabs bon gyi 'byung gnas* (Bon po), c.1439; 3) *Lho rong chos 'byung* (Bka' brgyud), 1450; 4) *Dge ldan chos 'byung* (Dge lugs), c. 1450. These are not depicted on the map.

With this recentering of history on Tibet, it is no surprise that there was a great proliferation of sectarian religious histories in this period. For instance, we can count among the new sectarian religious histories seven about the Bka' gdams/Dge lugs, five about the Bka' brgyud, and one each about the Sa skya and Rnying ma traditions.

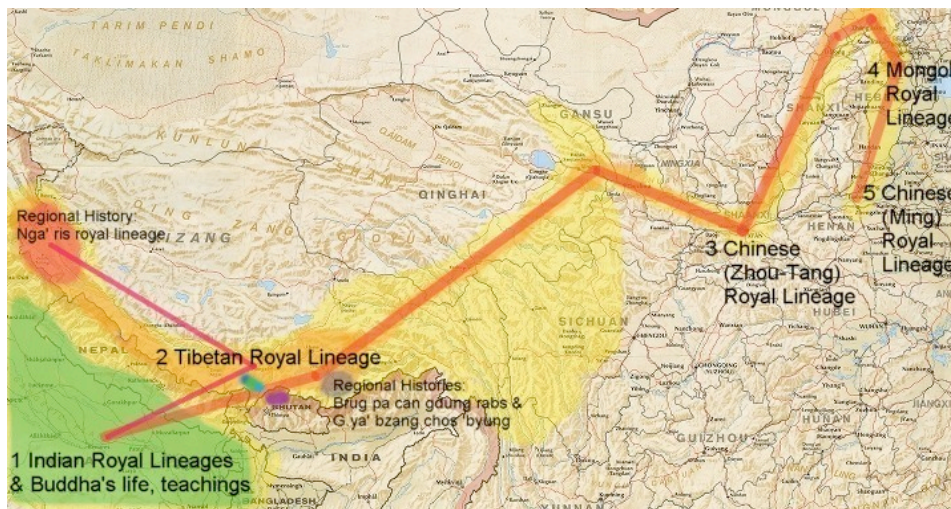


Figure 6: New Historical Texts (1476–1630s)³⁰

³⁰ Two new broad histories of Tibetan religion in this period were: 1) *Deb ther sngon po Bod chos 'byung* 1478, shown in yellow; 2) *Deb ther dmar po gsar ma* 1538 shown in orange. As for the proliferation of local histories, the earliest in this period were *Brug pa can gdung rabs* 1468 and *G.ya' bzang chos 'byung* 1475 (the G.ya' bzang myriarchy had held power in the region under the Mongols), shown in grey. The other histories that I have mapped here are color-coded on the map as follows: 3) *Mnga' ris chos 'byung* 1497, shown in red; 4) *Lho pa'i ru yig* c. 1550, shown in purple; and the last three which are clustered together on the map: 5) *Zha lu'i Lce gdung rabs* c. 1550, shown in dark blue; 6) *Gnas rnying chos 'byung* (Upper Nyang) c. 1573, shown as a green dot; 7) *Nyang chos 'byung* 1620 by Taranatha, shown in light blue. See also Taranatha's work, which might be called the first foreign 'national' history (of India) *Rgya dkar chos 'byung* 1608, illustrated by the green wash over India and southern Nepal.

Nor should it surprise us that the dominant rival traditions were the Bka' gdams/Dge lugs and the Bka' brgyud, whose political conflicts came to a head at the end of this period. But of special interest is the rise of regional histories during this period. The *G.ya' bzang* and *Mnga' ris chos 'byung* were the earliest significant regional histories in Tibetan literature. In the case of the *Mnga' ris chos 'byung* written by a Dge lugs pa missionary to the area, we see a model for what became a significant connection between the spread of the Dge lugs pa tradition to the peripheries of the Tibetan cultural area and the writing of regional histories in these areas. However, the remaining regional histories for the period cover much smaller localities (either a single family or institution or a single river valley, represented by Taranatha's *Nyang chos 'byung*). This last account is of special interest because it was tied primarily to a geographic region, and not one defined by the control of a particular noble family, as had been the case with the *G.ya' bzang* and *Mnga' ris chos 'byung*. Likewise, Taranatha's *Rgya dkar chos 'byung* is the first example of a foreign "national" history, that is, a religious history dedicated to a single country outside of Tibet. The rise of such histories is significant because it suggests a precedent for conceiving of other large regional entities outside of Central Tibet.

Another innovative text was 'Gos lo tsa ba Gzhon nu dpal's *Deb ther sngon po*, which for the first time in Tibetan historiography covered a significant part of the area that we now describe as the Tibetan cultural region. His attention is still focused on Central Tibet, but he pays much more attention to Khams than earlier accounts. His attention to Mdo smad still is limited to the account of the men who preserved the Vinaya lineage there, but he frequently takes note of the origins of men who came from this region to study in Central Tibet. One could never reconstruct a narrative of religious history in A mdo from this account, but this work is rare in paying this kind of attention to men from Mdo smad.

The next hundred years are marked by the rise of the Dga' ldan pho' brang, and thus the rise of Dge lugs pa histories as well as reactions to it, especially a proliferation of regional histories (see Figure 7). Like all politically

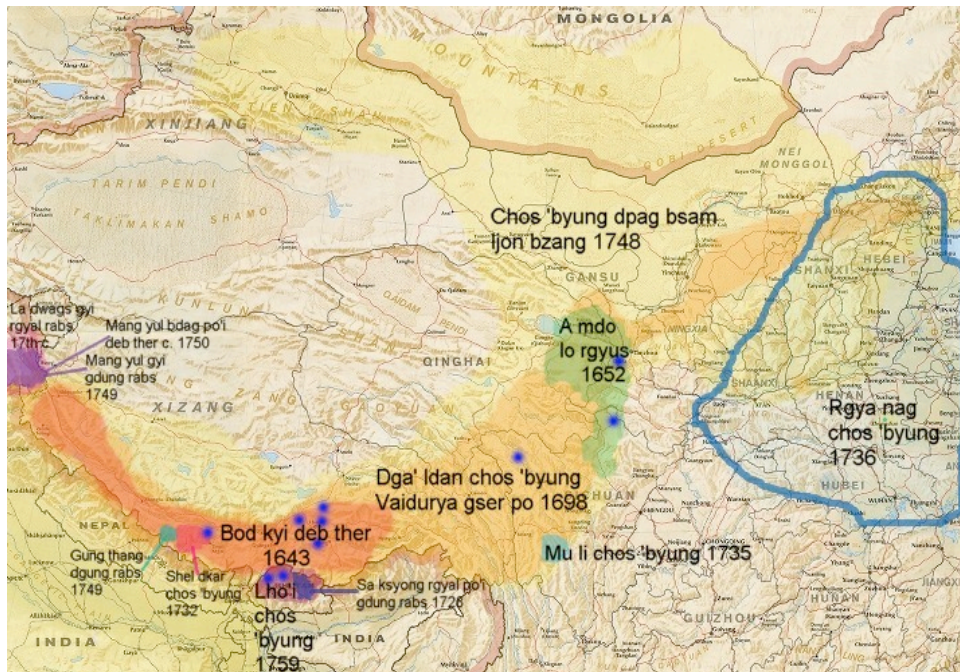


Figure 7: Dge lugs pa Histories & Local Histories 1643–1773³¹

³¹ This map roughly indicates the range of territory covered by Dge lugs pa histories: one Central Tibetan-wide history: *Bod kyi deb ther* 1643 by the fifth Dalai Lama (shown in dark orange); one history of Tibetan Buddhism in A mdo: *A mdo lo rgyus* 1652, by Skal ldan rgya mtsho (shown in green); one Tibet-wide sectarian monastery list: *Dga' ldan chos 'byung Vaidurya gser po* 1698 by Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (shown in light orange); the first extant “national” history of China to be composed in Tibetan: *Rgya nag chos 'byung* 1736 by Mgon po skyabs (the region covered outlined in blue), and the first religious history to cover all of Tibetan Buddhist Asia to be written in A mdo: *Chos 'byung dpag bsam ljon bzang* 1748 by Sum pa mkhen po Ishibaljir (shown in light yellow). The local histories are indicated as follows 1) *La dwags gyi rgyal rabs* c. 1655 (purple, far left); 2) *Sa skyong rgyal po gdung rabs* 1726 (dark blue) in today's

oriented texts up to this time, it limits its narrative of political legitimacy to the Central Tibetan region, from Mnga' ris to Dbus, a fact that modern Tibetan nationalists have neglected to notice. It is only in 1698, with Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's *Dga' ldan chos 'byung, the Golden Beryl*, that we first see all of the Tibetan regions included in a single geographically organized text. This text also happens to be the second largest text in Tibetan literature that is geographically organized, like the *Deb ther rgya mtsho*. Although Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's work was clearly an important influence on Brag dgon pa's work, it covers all of Tibet and part of the Mongol Ordos region and beyond (marked on Figure 7 by the extension of the light orange color out to the east) in a much briefer fashion than the *Deb ther rgya mtsho*—it is basically a register of Dge lugs pa monasteries, with very short entries—and it differs in being strictly organized around the principle of the diffusion of the Dge lugs pa tradition (as opposed to the history of the spread of religion in general or coverage of all sects or traditions of Tibetan Buddhism). However, this text is not focused merely on the growth of Dge lugs pa institutions as a sign of Tibetan political territory, because it includes the spread of the tradition even into the Ordos bend of the Yellow River and onto Beijing, areas over which the Dge lugs pa could hardly claim political control.

The religious history written by the Mongol Sum pa mkhan po Ishibaljir in 1748 also followed the same sort of geographic method of organization when discussing the spread of the Dge lugs pa tradition within Tibet, treating Dbus, Gtsang, Mnga' ris, Khams and A mdo under different headings.³² Moreover, it discussed India, China, and Mongolia as political

Bhutan; 3) *Shel dkar chos 'byung* 1732 (red); 4) *Mu li chos 'byung* 1735 (light blue); 5) *Mang yul gyi gdung rabs* 1749 (purple, far left); 6) *Gung thang dgung rabs* 1749 (green circle, lower left); 7) *Mar yul bdag po'i deb ther* c. 1750 (purple, far left); 8) *Lho'i chos 'byung* 1759 (Bhutan, light purple). The bright blue dots indicate narrowly local histories, such as those of specific families or monasteries.

³² Kapstein 2011.

entities with distinct religious histories. Sum pa mkhan po was also responsible for writing the first world geography in Tibetan, in 1777. The second such geography, which is discussed by Lobsang Yangdon in this volume, was written with much more depth by the Btsan po No mon han. We have no certain evidence about the ethnicity of this writer, though at least the first and possibly others in this incarnation lineage were Mongols, and I would guess it is likely he was as well. He was born in place called U lan mu ra (clearly a Mongol place name) probably in the Mongour region of A mdo, and his teachers were the Thu'u bkwan (from Chinese, *Tuguan*, meaning 'native official') and Chu bzang Qutughtus, who were also frequently ethnically Mongour in their various incarnations.³³ These two world geographies must have created a sensation as they discussed so many other countries (we would say nations) of which the Tibetans had previously never heard. Their narratives of successive 'national' territories organized according to a logic of contiguous space is the most obvious model for this aspect of Brag dgon pa's work. This may well be the clearest modern influence on Tibetan language literature in this period.

Two of the countries with which the Tibetans had a long time familiarity—China and Mongolia—were the subjects of two novel *chos 'byung* written by Mongols in this period: Mgon po skyabs' 1736 *Religious History of China* and Gu shri Tshe 'phel's 1819 *Religious History of Mongolia*. I cannot

³³ *Deb ther rgya mtsho* gives his birthplace as U lan mu ra and though this source lists his parents having Tibetan names (father: Don grup tshe brtan; mother: Dkar mo skid) this could merely reflect the Tibetanization experienced by the Mongols of this area by this time p. 105. Compare with the Mongol Shi Miaozhou, author of the 1934 *Meng Zang zheng jiao shi*. Xizangxue Hanwen wenxian congshu, 2. Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian zhongxin, part V, page 126, whose birthplace is described as being located in the Banner of the Enfeiffed Prince (Zhasake taiji) Damalin sebutan, who is said to be the son of Damalin zhabu (Tib. Dharma Rin [chen] bkra [shis bzang?] po). In other words, obviously, many Mongols had Tibetan names, and place of birth and linguistic origin of personal name did not determine ethnicity definitively.

say for certain whether Brag dgon pa imagined his work as emulating these models. It does seem to me that Brag dgon pa recognized that there was something unique about this northeastern part of Tibet (A mdo), that is, the important overlap between the Tibetans and the Mongols in this region, which is reflected in the organization of his text, as I have discussed above: defined partly by Mongols royalty and partly by reference to Bla brang monastery.

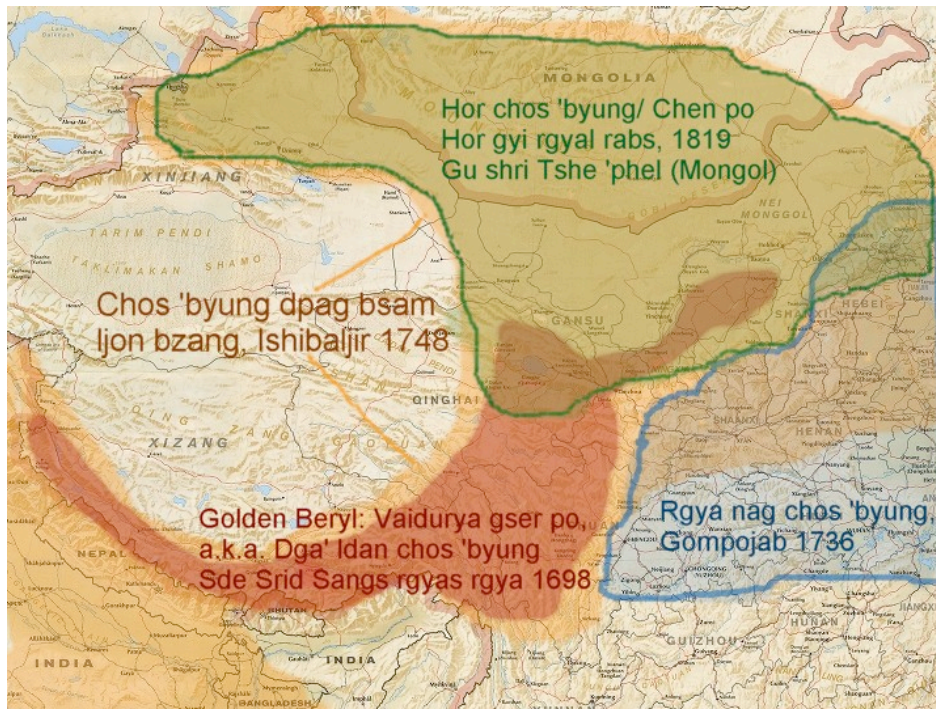


Figure 8. New *chos 'byung* that probably influenced Brag dgon pa

I describe here what Yonemoto calls “‘geosophy’—ways of thinking about the relationship between land, landscape, self and culture.”³⁴ It seems to me that at least some A mdo Tibetans (and note there are no words for such a conception in Tibetan: ‘A mdo ba’i bod pa’ is a nonsensical phrase)—I should simply say A mdo ba—started to conceive of their region as distinct from other

³⁴ Yonemoto 2003, 176.

Tibetan regions (to say nothing of Mongol or Chinese regions) with shared common features. The most obvious link is language, but this is not something articulated by the authors of A mdo-based texts.

The main shared aspect uniting A mdo that was articulated in the *Deb ther rgya tsho* is the Ma (Yellow) River, but even this dominating geographic feature cannot encompass all of A mdo. Instead, I would suggest that a non-exclusive Dge lugs pa religious domination and a history of being dominated by a Mongol royal line were the two more significant cultural factors that linked this territory. As the weight of Mongol rule lessened, its memory could provide a shared cultural context. As the strength of Dge lugs pa religious institutions spread, what was considered A mdo could grow to incorporate these newly converted regions.

There had been other local religious histories (the *G.ya' bzang*, *Mnga' ris*, *Mu li*, *Shel dkar* and *Lho chos 'byung* of Bhutan all come to mind), but there had never been a regional history that covered as much territory as this text did (see Figure 9).



Figure 9: Comparison of *Deb ther rgya mtsho* coverage with local *chos 'byung*

Was Brag dgon pa instead imagining his text as a companion volume to the religious histories of Central Tibet, Mongolia, China and India? If so, we might indeed be justified in seeing this text as almost a religio-national history, at least insofar as we could describe any of these religious histories as histories of ‘nations’. For China, India, Tibet, and probably even Bhutan we would be comfortable enough seeing them this way. This is the power of nations; they project themselves back in time. But can we look at regions that have failed to stand as nation-states today—Mnga’ ris, Shel dkar, G.ya’ bzang, Mu li or A mdo—in the same light? Could they have become nation-states (ranging in size like those of Europe, some quite small, some large) under different circumstances, in which case, these texts would have served as foundational to national histories.

Conclusion

Let me turn now to the final genre of historical texts, and the one that I believe influenced Brag dgon pa most profoundly: the *deb ther*. I think it is especially important that he chose to call his work the *Deb ther rgya mtsho*, while avoiding the use of the name *chos ’byung* (religious history) to characterize his work. Why is this significant? If we look at the list of previous *deb ther*, as recorded in his bibliography, we can see the model to which he aspired. With the exception of the *Deb ther sngon po*, which was written by a lama who was closely related to the political rulers of his day, all of these works were written by politically powerful figures, seeking to establish claims to regional or at the very least local authority, for themselves and/or the traditions with which they were associated.³⁵

³⁵ ’Gos lo tsA ba Gzhon nu dpal, edited by Klaus-Dieter Mathes 2003. *’Gos lo tsA ba Gzhon nu dpal’s Commentary on the Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā*. Kathmandu and Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, x.

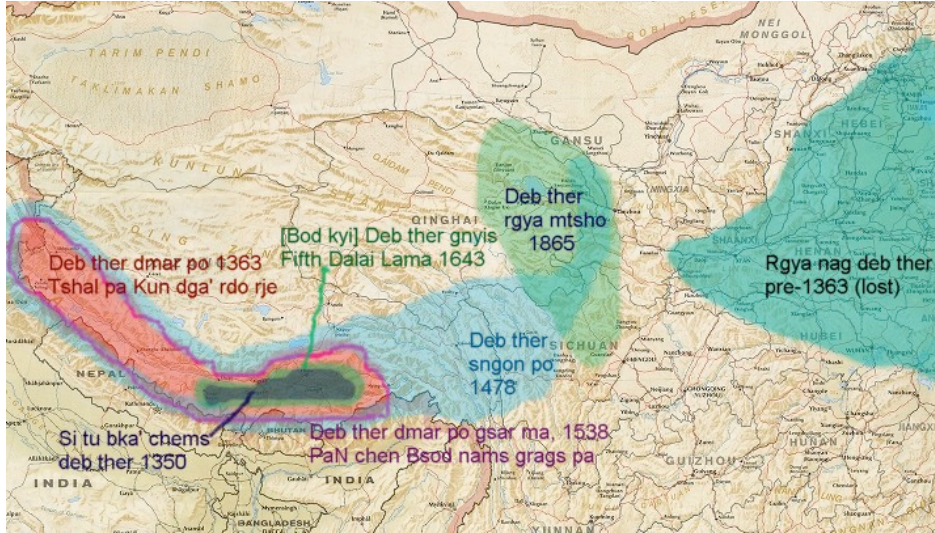


Figure 10: Comparison of coverage area of various *deb ther*

Of the extant *deb ther* texts (the *Rgya nag deb ther* does not survive), the first and last were written by veritable leaders of Tibet in their times, Ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan and the fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang rgya mtsho, respectively. The other three were written by religious figures, who presided over monasteries that were threatened by politico-religious rivals. That is, Tshal pa Kun dga' rdo rje had been the political leader of one of the more powerful political entities (the Tshal pa myriarchy based in Lha sa's Skyid River valley) before he retired and wrote his historical account and canonical catalogue. And in fact, in his lifetime, the Phag mo dru myriarchy did manage to extinguish the Tshal pa myriarchy.³⁶ In a repeat of the cycle, as the Phag mo dru myriarchy was yielding its dominance to the Rin spungs myriarchy, Gzhon nu dpal wrote the *Deb ther sngon po*. Although the *Deb ther sngon po* was not a political work and Gzhon nu dpal was not a political leader, he was closely related to the Phag mo dru myriarchy leaders and wrote his work in the same palace

³⁶ Bsod nams grags pa; translated and edited by Giuseppe Tucci 1971. *Deb t'er dmar po gsar ma*. Serie Orientale Roma 24. Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 194.

where he taught the last leader of the Phag mo dru regime, Ngag gi dbang phyug grags pa (1439–1495) in the final years of the myriarchy's exercise of practical power (effectively ended by the 1480s).³⁷ So we can see these texts as swan song attempts to assert the cultural, if not political, importance of each of these families' glory.

Similarly, PaN chen Bsod nams grags pa no doubt felt he was writing a similar history against the threat of the rise of a rival power, as he glorifies the defunct (in all but name) Phag mo dru regime as being the rightful and good rulers of Tibet. In this way he opposed the rulers of Gtsang who in 1537 had nearly taken the seat of the Dge lugs pa at Dga' ldan Monastery under their power and had actually succeeded in converting eighteen Dge lugs pa monasteries to the Red Hat tradition which they supported.³⁸ Since Bsod nams grags pa lived at Bkra shis lhun po, under the shadow of these new rulers of Gtsang, and since he had once presided over the center of the Dge lugs pa tradition at Dga' ldan, his account must be read in this politicized context. Like Tshal pa Kun dga' rdo rje, the pen was his only tool of legitimation in the absence of the strong sword of a political patron.

If I have established that these annals (*deb ther*) were political documents seeking to assert at least a literary authority over territory, then was Brag dgon pa seeking to assert a similar claim? Earlier I discussed how this text mimicked Central Tibetan historiographic traditions, by putting the Mongol rulers in the place of Tibetan emperors who were absent from A mdo history. The second part of this traditional pattern repeated by Brag dgon pa was that the continuity of legitimacy always passed in Tibetan historiography from royal lineages to religious lineages (whether Sa skya, Bka' brgyud, or Dge lugs). In the case of the *Deb ther rgya mtsho*, as the Mongol princes became weak, Bla brang rose in prominence. It is in this respect that Bla brang monastery and its abbots step into the role reserved in earlier Tibetan histories by the Sa skya family

³⁷ 'Gos lo tsA ba Gzhon nu dpal 2003, xiii.

³⁸ Giuseppe Tucci 1949. *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*. Roma: Libreria dello Stato, 44.

members, the various Bka' brgyud hierarchs, or even the Dalai Lamas of Central Tibet. If we look at this as a tacit challenge to even the authority of the Dalai Lamas, it is clear why Brag dgon pa needed to insert that passage about the fifth Dalai Lama only being offered the 13 myriarchies (*khri skor*) of Central Tibet into the description of how Tibet was properly partitioned.

And there is another sense in which this text resembles the previous *deb ther*—even those written by the political victors like Ta'i si tu Byang chub rgyal mtshan and the fifth Dalai Lama, which at best only marked the zenith of a polity and not the promise of future glory. None of these polities praised in these accounts retained real political power for more than a century after they were written, though some retained an air of legitimacy for several centuries. And likewise, the *Deb ther rgya mtsho* celebrated the height of the Mongol-Tibetan alliance in A mdo just before the Muslim uprisings destroyed so much of northern A mdo's religio-political legitimacy. These late-nineteenth-century rebellions heralded the rise of Muslim power in the region that has proven to be a long-term challenge to Bla brang and A mdo Tibetans in general. Even before the rise of Chinese Nationalist and Communist power in the region, this Muslim power may have ended any possibility that a shared sense of territory in A mdo would ever morph into an A mdo nation. In fact, this Muslim threat has often driven A mdo Tibetans into closer alliance with the Chinese. In the end, whether these historical circumstances encouraged or extinguished an A mdo—or greater Tibetan—nationalism is a question that remains to be answered.³⁹

³⁹ Paul Nietupski addresses this issue in *Labrang Monastery: A Tibetan Buddhist Community on the Inner Asian Borderlands, 1709-1958*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aris, Michael 1989. *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives: A Study of Pemalingpa, 1450–1521, and the Sixth Dalai Lama, 1683–1706*. London; New York: Kegan Paul.
- Atwood, Christopher 2004. *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*. New York: Facts on File.
- Borjigidai, Uyunbilig 2002. The Hoshuud polity in Khökhnuur (Kokonor). *Inner Asia* 4, 181–96.
- Bsod nams grags pa; Giuseppe Tucci, ed. and trans. 1971. *Deb t'er dmar po gsar ma*. Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente.
- Chayet, Anne 2002. A propos de notations géographiques dans l'*A mdo chos 'byung*, In Henk Blezer (ed.) *Tibet, Past and Present, Tibetan Studies I*. Leiden: Brill, 247–62.
- 2008. A propos l'usage des termes “nyin” et “srib” dans le *Mdo smad chos 'byung*, *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 14, 71–80.
- Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, Brag dgon Zhabs drung 1974 [1865]. *Yul mdo smad kyi ljongs su thub bstan rin po che ji ltar dar ba'i tshul gsal bar brjod pa Deb ther rgya mtsho: A History of the Spread of Buddhism in Amdo*. Yon tan rgya mtsho (ed.) Delhi: A lags 'Jam dbyangs and Wa shul Skal bzang Bstan pa.
- 1987 [1865]. *Mdo smad chos 'byung*. Zi ling: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang.
- Goldstein, Melvyn (ed.) 2001. *The New Tibetan-English Dictionary of Modern Tibetan*. University of California Press: Berkeley.
- Gongquehudaanbaraoji, Zhiguanba; Wu Jun, Mao Jizu, and Ma Shilin, trans. 1989 [1865]. *Anduo zheng jiao shi*. Lanzhou: Gansu sheng minzu chubanshe.
- 'Gos lo tsA ba Gzhon nu dpal, edited by Klaus-Dieter Mathes 2003. *'Gos lo tsA ba Gzhon nu dpal's Commentary on the Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā*. Kathmandu and Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.
- Gyatso, Janet 1987. Down with the demoness: Reflections on a feminine ground in Tibet. In Janice Willis (ed.) *Feminine Ground: Essays on Women and Tibet*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion.
- Johnson, Betty Carol 1972. Europe according to the *'Dzam gling rgyas bshad*. M.A. thesis, University of Washington.

- Kapstein, Matthew 2009. The treaty temple of the Turquoise Grove. In Matthew Kapstein (ed.) *Buddhism between China and Tibet*. Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism Series. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- 2011. Just where on Jambudvīpa are we? New geographic knowledge and old cosmological schemes in eighteenth-century Tibet. In Sheldon Pollock (ed.) *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern South Asia*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Li An-che 1994. *History of Tibetan Religion: A Study in the Field*. Beijing: New World Press.
- Maher, Derek 2011. An examination of a critical appraisal of Tsepon Shakabpa's *One Hundred Thousand Moons*, In Gray Tuttle (ed.) *The Rise of the Modern in Tibet*, Beiträge zur Zentralasienforschung, International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies—Wissenschaftsverlag GmbH: Sankt Augustin.
- Martin, Dan 1997. *Tibetan Histories: A Bibliography of Tibetan-Language Historical Works*. London: Serindia Publications.
- Miller, Robert J. 1998. The supine demoness and the consolidation of an empire. *The Tibet Journal*, 23(3), 3–23.
- Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, the fifth Dalai Lama; Zahiruddin Ahmad, trans. 1995. *A History of Tibet by the Fifth Dalai Lama of Tibet*, Bloomington, IN: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies.
- Nietupski, Paul 2011. *Labrang Monastery: A Tibetan Buddhist Community on the Inner Asian Borderlands, 1709–1958*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Petech, Luciano 1980. The Mongol census in Tibet. In M. Aris and Aung San Suu Kyi (eds) *Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson*. Warminster, UK: Aris & Philips.
- Richardson, Hugh 1998. The fifth Dalai Lama's decree appointing Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho as regent. In Hugh Richardson; Michael Aris (ed.) *High Peaks, Pure Earth*. London: Serindia Publications.
- Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, Sde srid 1989 [1698]. *Dga' ldan chos 'byung beedurya [Vaidurya] ser po*. Rdo rje rgyal po (ed.) Pe cin: Krung go'i bod kyi shes rigs dpe skrun khang.
- Schweiger, Peter 1999. Towards a biography of Don yod rdo rje, king of Be ri. In Helmut Eimer et al. (eds) *Studia Tibetica et Mongolica (Festschrift Manfred Taube)*. Swisttal-Odendorf: Indica et Tibetica Verlag.

- Shabkar Tsogdruk Rangdrol; Matthieu Ricard, Jakob Leschly, Erik Schmidt, Marilyn Silverstone, and Lodrö Palmo, trans.; Edited by Constance Wilkinson with Michal Abrams 1994. *The Life of Shabkar: The Autobiography of a Tibetan Yogin*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion.
- Shakabpa. W.D. 1984. *Tibet: A Political History*. New York: Potala Publications.
- Shi Miaozhou 1934 [1993]. *Meng Zang zheng jiao shi*. Xizangxue Hanwen wenxian congshu, 2. Beijing: Quanguo tushuguan wenxian zhongxin.
- Smith, E. Gene 2001. *Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Himalayan Plateau*. Kurtis R. Schaeffer (ed.) Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Tan Qixiang (ed.) 1996 [1982]. *Zhongguo li shi di tu ji*. Vol. 7 (Yuan Ming shi qi). Beijing: Zhongguo ditu chubanshe.
- Tucci, Giuseppe 1949. *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*. Roma: Libreria dello Stato.
- Thomas, F.W. 1955. *Tibetan Literary Texts and Documents Concerning Chinese Turkestan, Part III*. London: Luzac & Co.
- Uebach, Helga 1990. On Dharma-colleges and their teachers in the ninth century Tibetan empire, In Paolo Daffinà (ed.) *Indo-Sino-Tibetica: Studi in Onore di Luciano Petech*. Roma: Bardi Editore.
- 1991. Dbyar-mo-thang and Gong-bu ma-ru. Tibetan historiographical tradition of the treaty of 821/823. In Ernest Steinkellner (ed.) *Tibetan History and Language: Studies Dedicated to Uray Géza on his Seventieth Birthday*. Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien.
- van der Kuijp, Leonard 2006. On the composition and printings of the *Deb ther sngon po*. *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies* (3–4), 1–64.
- Yonemoto, Marcia 2003. *Mapping Early Modern Japan: Space, Place, and Culture in the Tokugawa Period (1603–1868)*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wylie, Turrell 1962. *The Geography of Tibet according to the 'Dzam-gling-rgyas-bshad*. *Serio Orientale Roma* 25, Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente.