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Cartographic Survey of *Dzong* Sites on Central Tibet

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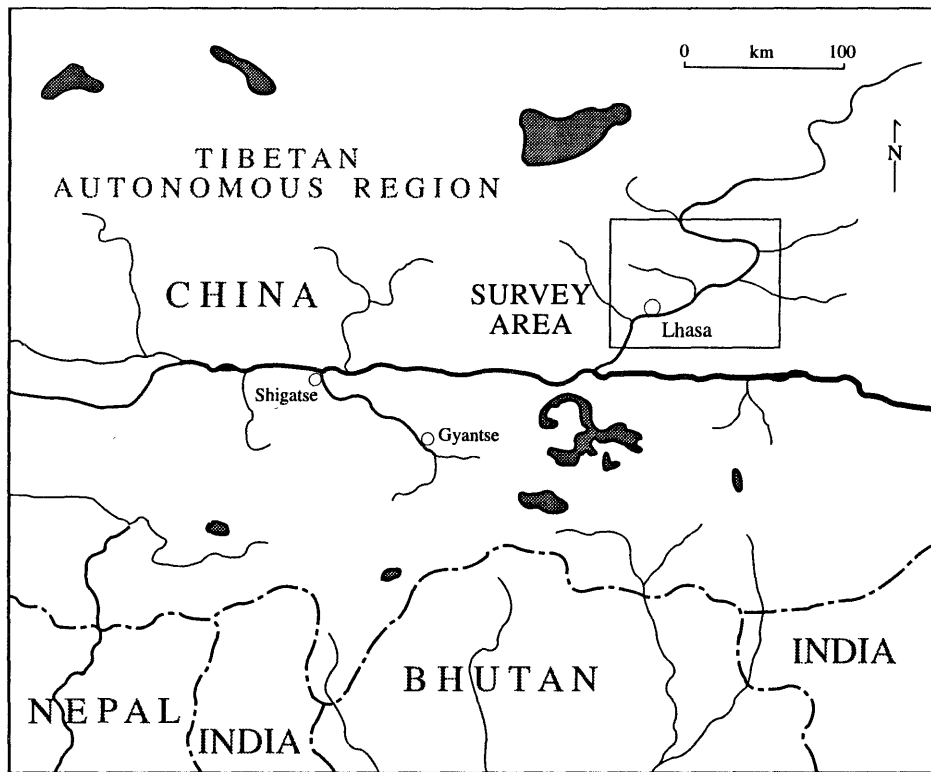


Fig. 1 Survey area in central Tibet (see Figure 2 for details of the inset).

In this report a brief outline of a field-survey of sacred/historical sites in Central Tibet conducted during the summer of 1994 is presented, and analyzed partly through a comparison with existing cartographic sources. These sites are located along the upper Kyi Chu (Figure 1), in a region that was under the direct control of the traditional Kingdom of the Dalai Lamas. (According to Petech (1973) the magistrates of the walled town at the foot of the Potala exercised jurisdiction 26 miles up the Kyi Chu and nineteen down it.)

The field-survey was based on traditional politico-economic regions defined by the central location of a dzong (Figure 2). Until 1959 the Tibetan *dzong* (fortress) constituted an important part of the traditional

field administration of the Kingdom of the Dalai Lamas. It may be seen from a study of Tibetan history that people in the traditional administrative bureaucracy were assigned ranks, and that the dzong also came to exhibit a regional hierarchy after the sweeping institutional reforms of the Fifth Dalai Lama during the seventeenth century. In the 19th century Serat Chandra Das (1902) noted that there were 53 dzong .

Some of the best maps for the study of Tibetan historical geography were compiled by the Survey of India during the early 20th century as part of a Quarter-Inch (1:253,440) series of the northern frontier. A linguistic study of the place names on these medium-scale maps reveals valuable information about many sites. However, a major difficulty encountered during

the survey resulted from the often inaccurate application of the term dzong on the Survey of India maps, as in Tibetan, Chinese and western literary sources. Many sites of administrative importance under the traditional system were not proper dzong but either governmental

revenue estates (Zhika), or aristocratic estates (Zhi). These estates often came to play such important roles in regional trade and administration that by the late 19th and early 20th century Survey of India explorers and map-makers assumed some of these sites to be dzong.

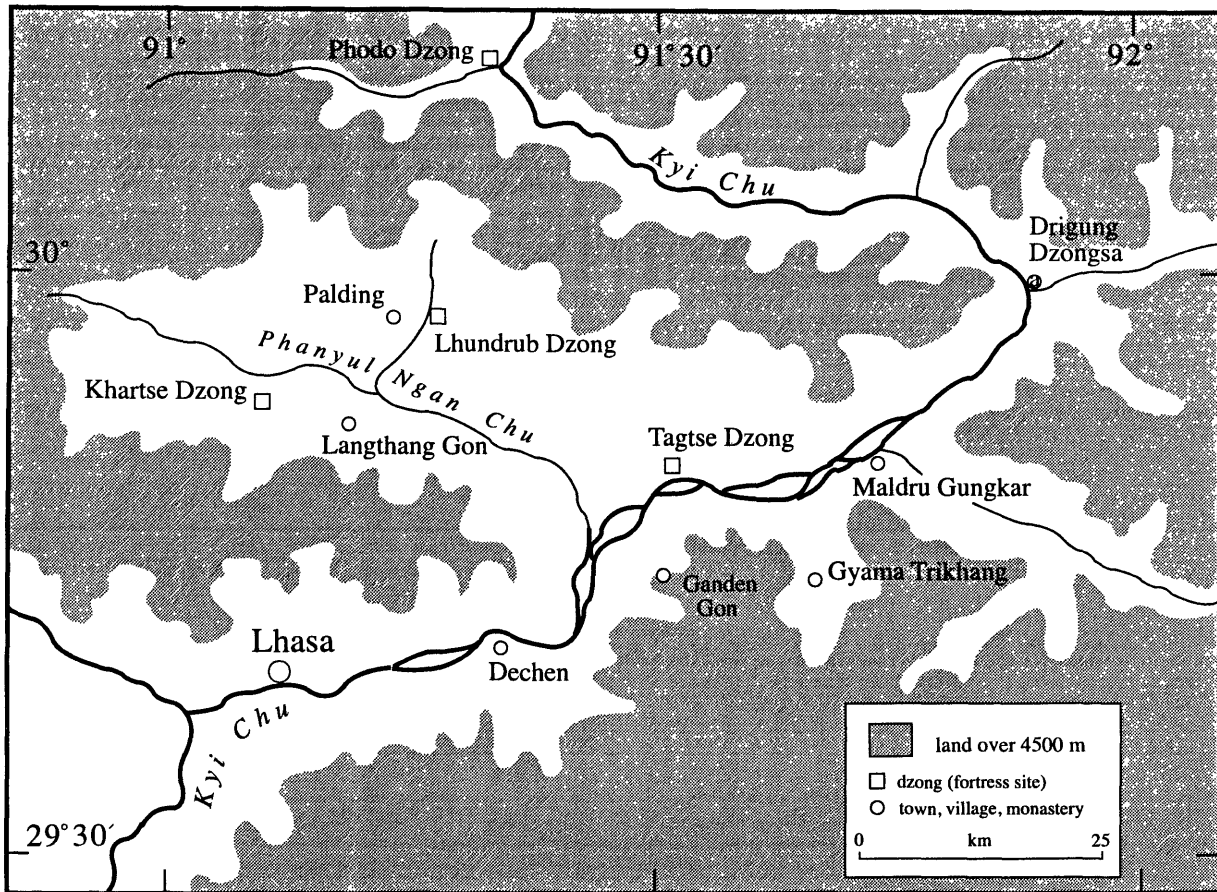


Fig. 2 Upper Kyi Chu watershed and important sacred/historical sites.

Of great significance today are the locations of past and present trade routes through Central Asia that the dzong and estates indicate. Two of the most important traditional trade routes between China and Tibet terminated on the upper Kyi Chu watershed. Coming from Sichuan to the east the Gya Lam, or China Road, entered the valley of the Kyi Chu by way of Maldru Gungkar Zhi. A branch of the main northeastern trade route from Qinghai passed Phodo and Lhundrub dzong on its way to Lhasa. It was mainly along such trade routes as these that the dzong of the outlying regions were administered from Lhasa. Although an extensive survey of all of these sites has not yet been undertaken by western scholars, it is clear that the process whereby Lhasa extended its control into the outlying regions was

gradual. The dzong provide a reasonably reliable measure of areas that were long administered from Lhasa, albeit often in a complex relationship with local elites.

The survey was divided into two regions based on dzong sites depicted on sheet 77 O of the Survey of India Quarter Inch series (first edition, 1925). Under the international numbering system this sheet is referred to as H-46 N. The first region consists of the main valley of the Kyi Chu from Lhasa to Drigung Dzongsa where two dzong, namely Dechen and Takste, are indicated on the map. The tributary valley of the Phanyul Ngan Chu comprises the second region with Langdong and Lhundrub dzong indicated. All of these sites are located

below 4,500 meters. This important contour delineates the approximate boundary between herders and agropastoralists in Central Tibet. During the summer period of the survey yaks were only noticed in herds above 4,500 meters, while cattle and goats were grazed in agricultural areas. Barley and wheat comprised the principal crops.

Discussions with local residents at the indicated sites along the Kyi Chu revealed that Dechen was not a dzong during the pre-1959 period, but an estate of high status because of the posting there of both a monk and a lay official from Lhasa. Today a modern town serving as the administrative seat of Takste county lies below the ruins of an acropolis fortress site. Takste dzong, however, was a proper dzong. It was held by a lay official. The ruins of Takste dzong are similar to those of Dechen in that only the walls are still relatively intact.

In the Phanyul valley the monastery of Langthang occupies the site mistakenly referred to as Langdong dzong on the map. To the north Lhundrub dzong was a proper dzong held by a monk. Today only remnants of its walls are visible above a village that was, until a few years ago, the seat of Lhundrub county. A good example of the traditional manorial/fortress architecture of this region may be seen today in the surviving structure of Palding Zhi, located several miles to the west of Lhundrub dzong. This former estate bears striking similarity to a photograph of Lhundrub dzong taken by Sir Charles Bell in 1921. The ruined dzong of Khartse, that was held by a lay official, was mapped during the survey. Surprisingly, this dzong is not depicted on the Survey of India map.

Within the survey area only the site of Gyama Trikhang, named Tigang by the Survey of India, was indicated with the symbol for fort on the map. Field-work revealed sections of the wall still standing in some places. Gyama Trikhang was one of the thirteen myriarchies, or ten-thousand household units, established in Central Tibet during the Yuan (Mongol) dynasty period of the 13th century.

Drigung Dzongsar, located at the eastern edge of the survey area, was also one of the thirteen myriarchies.

This site was never brought under the more recent dzong system, controlled as it was by a lama of the Drigung order of Tibetan Buddhism. Architectural similarities with the Potala palace at Lhasa are noticeable in a photograph from the early 20th century contained in Ferrari's translation of a 19th century Tibetan pilgrimage guide to Central Tibet. Rebuilding of the destruction wrought during the cultural revolution is currently under way. The current plans of the monks appear to envision a complete reconstruction of the site.

The findings of this survey demonstrate how the intricate social relations of traditional Tibetan society, as manifested in the built environment, require that field-work constitute an integral component of the compilation of a historical atlas of the Tibetan Plateau region. It is important that as much survey work as possible be conducted now during the late 20th century since members of the surviving generation that remember the pre-1959 cultural landscape are rapidly passing away.

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