Tribal Mobility and Religious Fixation: Remarks on Territorial Transformation and Identity in Imperial and Early Post-Imperial Tibet

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At the start of the seventh century CE, there was a political upheaval in the southern agrarian zone of the Tibetan Highlands that was to have a lasting impact. A union of rival clans under the leadership of a local dynasty, the Pugyel ('Princes of Pu' (*spu rgyal*)),[1] led to the formation of a united kingdom. The Pugyel and their allies represented the new political unit as a holy order whose maintenance was guaranteed by the sovereign, henceforth entitled the *tsänpo* (*btsan po*), 'powerful one' (i.e. emperor). An effective military organization permitted the kingdom, striving for outward expansion, rapidly to emerge as a leading power in Central Asia. In the eighth century the empire came to extend beyond the Himalayas in the south, as far as Yunnan and Sichuan in the south-east and east, and into present-day north Pakistan in the west, and controlled the city states on the Silk Road in the north. Tang China, the powerful neighbour in the east, was repeatedly put in its place by Tufan, as Tibet (T. Bö (Bod); below, n. 9) was known in the Chinese sources. In the mid-ninth century the empire disintegrated almost as fast as it had emerged. But its after-effects were enormous and in many respects formative for the following epochs. The post-imperial era is the history of the extension and establishment of Buddhism (Lamaism) in the Highlands, which in its discourses created the vision of a common Tibetan history and led to the flowering of Buddhist universalism, the seeds of which had been sown in the period of the *tsänpo*. The development of the religion took place within a tribal order, represented by the patrilineal clans, which survived the break-up of the empire and established a new polity in union with Buddhism. These two developments of the foundation of

[1] Tibetan names and terms in brackets represent their transliterated form in accordance with the Wylie System. Abbreviations used in this article: T. = Tibetan, S. = Sanskrit, Ch. = Chinese.

the empire and the Lamaist expansion transformed the ethnic, religious and social identities within this area in favour of new concepts of integration and community-building. They found their expression not least in a specific political geography of the imperial (seventh–ninth century) and hegemonial (twelfth–seventeenth century) periods which I will outline in the following with regard to the decisive mechanisms of integration and the associated territorial transformations.

The Building of the Empire

The core zones of the Highlands were the agrarian areas of Central Tibet, on either side of the Tsangpo River (Brahmaputra) (Figure 2.1). From the third and fourth centuries, a number of local polities (in the sources described as 'petty kingdoms', *gyetren* (*rgyal phran*)) developed here. These were stratified, clan-based societies headed by ruling lineages (i.e. lineages of 'lords' and 'ministers', *je*, *lön* (*rje*, *blon*)). In the tradition, the bearers of the lineages were described as the 'people of inner Tibet' (*bod nang gi mi'u*) and as descendents of (four) proto-clans that were supposed to go back to a common ancestry – a fabrication of later, nationalistically coloured accounts of history, because the names of these 'proto-clans' are rather to be identified as ethnonyms referring to people of different origins (various Turkic groups and groups linguistically belonging to the Tibeto-Burmese family of languages).[2] The

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[2] The 'Tibetans' do not appear in the classical (post-imperial) account of Tibetan anthropogenesis and socio-genesis: see Tsering Gyalbo, Guntram Hazod and Per Kjeld Sørensen, *Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham–po: The Royal House of lHa–Bug–pa–can and the History of g.Ya'–bzang. Historical Texts from the Monastery of g.Ya'–bzang in Yar–stod (Central Tibet)*, Beiträge zur Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens, 36, Denkschriften der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, 290 (Vienna, 2000), pp. 55f. The 'four great clans' (*rüchen shi* (*rus chen bzhi*)) were associated with Minyag (Tangut), the Sumpa (Ch. Supi) and Azha (Ch. Tuyuhun) (both of Turkic tongues) and with the population of Zhangzhung (Zhang–zhung). The last mentioned relates to the prehistoric Zhangzhung power in present-day west Tibet, which was conquered by the Tibetans in the seventh century. In this account the Zhangzhung people are linked with the *rü* (clan, lit. 'bone') called Ma (*rma*), a term for 'man' and an ethnonym that in this classification probably also includes the originally Tibeto-Burmese population of the Highlands usually associated with the name Mön (Mon). 'Tibet' derives from the Arabic 'Tubbat', which denoted

postulation of a common origin is not entirely unjustified, however, because it indicates a reality under which the core areas of the Highlands had already developed a cultural homogeneity in the centuries before the foundation of the empire. The 'petty kingdoms' are here the result of this early Tibetan identity.[3]

The patrilinear clan as the primary structural principle of this segmentary pre-state order was connected with a particular territory, and ancestrally linked to a territorial divinity, which each represented the celestial unity of the individual settlement areas. The territory of the Pugyel was Yarlung, with the snow mountain called Yarlha Shampo as the territorial god (*lha*). Like the other *gyetren*, it was affinally linked with several units, such as those described as 'ancient relatives at the four borders' (*nanyen thashi rab* (*gna' gnyen mtha' bzhi*)), four local dynasties that bordered Yarlung, each of which formed its own *gyetren*. Furthermore, the

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the Tuyuhun, one of the components of this ethnic construct of 'Tibet'. Matthew T. Kapstein, *The Tibetans*, The Peoples of Asia (Oxford, 2006), p. 29, summarizes the question of Tibetan origin: 'The peoples of the Tibetan plateau became Tibetan primarily owing to cultural developments during the past two millennia, rather than to common genetic origins.' This cultural assimilation process, which was a process of ethnization, was forced and concretized by the development of the empire and led, among other things, to a Tibetan *lingua franca*. There are numerous Indo-Germanic elements in it, which go back to early contacts with Indo-Scythian groups in the north-east of the Highlands (ibid., pp. 18f.); see also Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present* (Princeton, 2009), p. 375.

[3] Cf. Brandon Dotson, 'Complementarity and opposition in early Tibetan ritual', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 128, 1 (2008): 41–67. One of the outstanding commonalities of pre-imperial Central Tibet is the tumulus tradition (and the associated ritual complexes; John Vincent Bellezza, 'gShen–rab Myi–bo: his life and times according to Tibet's earliest literary sources', *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, 19 (October 2010): 31–118), whose beginnings are to be dated to at least the fourth century (Guntram Hazod, 'Imperial Central Tibet – an annotated cartographical survey of its territorial divisions and key political sites', in Brandon Dotson and Guntram Hazod, *The Old Tibetan Annals: An Annotated Translation of Tibet's First History*, Veröffentlichungen zur Sozialanthropologie, 12 (Vienna, 2009), p. 175). They point to the '*gyetren* culture' as part of the Eurasian culture complex, with the tumulus tradition as a late inheritance of the Indo-Scythian contacts. See Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road*, p. 127; see also above, n. 2.

sources speak of the 'six clans of paternal subjects' (*yabang rüdrug* (*yab 'bangs rus drug*)), clans of the *lön* ('minister') category (see above), which were allied to the Pugyel.[4] It appears they also formed something like a ritual unit, where in the course of a joint hunt (the hunt for the wild Yak) the Pugyel regularly had to prove his sacred power.[5] The clans of these *gyetren* units were transregional, that is, apart from their own territory they had branch settlements in various areas. Thus a clan in one unit could represent the ruling lineage (*je* (*rje*)) and elsewhere serve as a *lön* lineage. The link to the home territory here remained an important identity criterion. It also explains the mutual demarcation of the *gyetren*, which not only faced one another as bride-giver and bride-taker but also waged wars against each other. The sources finally make it clear that the alliance formations were apparently relatively open and had no lasting foundation. The *lön* lineages could leave the alliance at any time, as is made clear in the description of the rival of Yarlung, the house of Ngäpo (Ngas–po). Several clans left the alliance of the Lord of Ngäpo, who is described as unloved, and joined the Yarlung lord, entitled 'Son of the Gods' (*lha sä* (*lha sras*)), and indeed linked to the suggestion to destroy the territory of their former chief. The successful crusade against the rival, with his territory in the area of the Lhasa valley, was the actual start of the foundation of the empire.[6]

The alliance of the Pugyel and his heroic fellow combatants was of a new quality, as the records in the early chronicles, with their panegyrics to the Yarlung house, show. The mythical charter, which legitimized the figure of a god king, now addressed as *lha tsänpo* ('divine mighty one'), was essentially the principle of higher descent, according to which the mythical progenitor of the Pugyel line was described as the distant progenitor of all lines. 'Yarlha Shampo (the territorial god (*lha*) of Yarlung) is the highest *lha*', it says in the *Old Tibetan*

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[4] Brandon Dotson, 'Administration and law in the Tibetan Empire: the section on law and state and its Old Tibetan antecedents' (Phil. diss. Oxford, 2007), pp. 76f.

[5] Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen, *Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham–po*, p. 220.

[6] Brandon Dotson and Guntram Hazod, *The Old Tibetan Annals: An Annotated Translation of Tibet's First History*, Veröffentlichungen zur Sozialanthropologie, 12 (Vienna, 2009), pp. 16ff.

Chronicles,[7] which are full of (landscape) metaphors of the height and extent of the Yarlung dynasty (see also below). We see the ideology of the god king thus based on a structural principle that was anchored in the tribal order, that is, it resulted from the tradition, which also made possible the spontaneous agreement of all segments in this order. Several of the originally rival groups voluntarily joined the new alliance, others were incorporated by violence.

What we call the development into an 'early state' in Tibet actually appears to be the consequence of the foundation of a pragmatic alliance of regional powers that pursued a common aim: to realize a larger political and economic project, namely to participate more strongly in the markets on the Silk Road or to control them. We know that the transition from a segmented, regional order to an early state is usually conditioned by a range of different factors – ecological, economic and demographic. In Tibet, according to the descriptions in the *Old Tibetan Annals* and other sources, the striving for the markets of the Silk Road was in any case a decisive impulse. Here it is important to know that the Highlands were surrounded by superior neighbours – above all China (the time of the Sui dynasty, 581–617 CE, and later of the Tang dynasty, 618–907), the city states in the Tarim Basin (Kashgar, Khotan, Kucha, Yarkand and others) and India in the south (Figure 2.1). And the trade and transit routes had passed over the Highlands for centuries. Thus the old 'petty kingdoms' had long been involved in exchange on the peripheries of these routes, and with the foundation of the empire they were only bringing themselves into this transit network as a new power factor – presumably also in order not to be taken in by more powerful opponents.[8]

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[7] Jacques Bacot, Frederick William Thomas and Gustave Charles Touissaint, *Documents de Touen-houang relatifs a l'histoire du Tibet* (Paris 1940–46), pp. 81 (l. 25) and 86.

[8] Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road*, p. 127, notes that the more exact motivations behind the appearance of the Tibetan Empire have not yet been identified. He himself, however, mentions 'the strong interest in trade' in this connection (p. 127, n. 51), and in fact the descriptions in the *Old Tibetan Annals* or the indications in later chronicles (such as the early establishment of trade routes summarized as the 'eight profits' (*khe brgyad*) under the

The foundation of the empire was followed within a few decades by an effective reorganization of the country, where – probably drawing partly on earlier Turkic models – the division of the core area into 'horns' (*ru*) each subdivided into 'civil districts' (*yülde* (*yul sde*)) and 'military thousand districts' (*gö tongde* (*rgod stong sde*)) served as the basis for the civil and military administration (i.e. taxation and the calling up of the regiments).[9] The transregional clans allied with the emperor, who remained in their lands, were entrusted with the ministerial tasks of the administration and the leadership of the military units. In the eighth century Tibet developed into a leading military power in the Central Asian area, whose outer boundaries finally included the important stages of the Silk Road and were secured by a range of garrisons.[10]

Figure 2.1 Tibet in the late eighth, early ninth century

The opening up of the markets went hand in hand with an intensification of the cultural contacts and the taking over of cultural elements – in the field of medicine, astrology, geomancy, architecture and above all religion (i.e. Buddhism). Linked to religion was the creation of a writing system (in the first half of the seventh century, developed on the pattern of north Indian writing) – worldwide a characteristic institution in the formation phase of the state, which in Tibet initially served for the announcement of the declarations of the *tsänpo* (including the writing of the 'texts of laws').[11] One took what one needed – resulting in a pragmatic syncretism in various cultural areas. These new introductions were in principle all related to the

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administration of particular clans: see Dotson, 'Administration', pp. 228f.) underline the economic motives for this foundation act, which to a certain extent from the start had the plan of (profitable) conquests inscribed on its standard.

[9] These military and civil districts largely lay in the area of present-day Central Tibet (Figure 2.1), which was described as Bö (Bod). It became a synonym for 'Tibet' (and 'Great Tibet', Bod-chen). This Bö region, for its part, formed one of the five administrative zones that were established farther outwards in the course of the expansion of the empire. In the ninth century, nine garrisons (*trom* (*khrom*)) formed the spatial conclusion of the empire (Dotson and Hazod, *Old Tibetan Annals*, pp. 37f.; Hazod, 'Imperial Central Tibet').

[10] See above, n. 8.

[11] Dotson and Hazod, *Old Tibetan Annals*, p. 85; Kapstein, *Tibetans*, p. 57.

ruling house and its cult. This is true in particular for Buddhism (according to tradition introduced from Nepal and China), which initially was only intended for the court and included the foundation of temples as a symbolic element of order, before it was declared the state religion in the eighth century after the foundation of the first monastery (Samye, 779 CE). Apart from the enormous impetus to cultural achievements that Buddhism triggered in the eighth century, its introduction also sowed the seeds of the empire's collapse. It was not a military defeat that led to the dissolution of the throne, but a general withdrawal of the aristocratic clans from the alliance with the ruler, as the Buddhist religious king moved to the centre of a new religion and cult no longer shared by all.

The 'Mobile Centre'

We recognize the contract between the holy throne of the emperor and the peripheral clans, which was regularly renewed by a holy oath, as the actual core of the empire and state formation. Here the king swore 'by his head' to guarantee his devoted vassals particular privileges; essentially, this was the recognition of their territories and in some cases also the guarantee of relative autonomy, which permitted some major lines to continue their own pre-imperial structures of a local dynasty.[12] From this it is also clear that alongside the idea of the centre, a political regionalism continued to exist. With a view to the internal consolidation of power, we now find a significant political geography, which likewise reflects this configuration of the old 'clanscape' networking in the central Tibetan core zones. The decisive proof is provided by the *Old Tibetan Annals*.[13] This bureaucratic register records the imperial gathering called by the great ministers twice a year, as well as the location of the winter and summer residences of the court, which like that of the council (*dünsa*; *'dun sa*) constantly alternated. We see here the geography of a 'mobile centre', where the constant moving of the court and the assembly signified the suitable strategy for state integration. An identification of this network of

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[12] Hazod, 'Imperial Central Tibet', p. 192.

[13] Dotson and Hazod, *Old Tibetan Annals*.

place names, which we are only gradually recording today, leads to the conclusion that with the places it is a question of the old home territories of lineages which, as it were, acted as hosts to the emperor and the council.[14] This fact appears extremely significant to us, as we find here a structural element of a tribally organized early state formation, under which the 'centre' (court and government) does not have a fixed location but is in movement, a movement that runs from the centre to the periphery (it is the emperor who goes into the lands of his allies in order to renew the oath). It forms an essential difference to the later development of the bureaucratic state, which has a fixed centre of government (a 'capital') and is centripetal, with a movement from the outside to the centre. We would like to note that this geography of the 'mobile centre' is still hardly acknowledged in anthropological theory. Rather, in the classics on the theory of the 'early state'[15] we still find the false picture according to which state formation in agrarian cultures always goes together with the creation of a governing centre fixed to a particular location. In the secondary literature on Tibet, too, we still find the widespread image according to which Lhasa was the capital of the empire. In reality, it is only mentioned once or twice in the *Annals* and the authors here are misled by the idealized descriptions in the post-imperial chronicles, where Lhasa is described as the seat of the first Buddhist king (Songtsän Gampo, d. 649 CE), who founded the famous Jokhang in Lhasa (see below). Only in the seventeenth century, when the Dalai Lama and the newly founded government moved in there, did Lhasa become a capital in the classical sense (with the seat of the government and the aristocratic establishment, a market and trading centre, and so on).

The heir-producing lineages had a particularly important place within the circle of lineages allied to the *tsänpo*. They provided the 'maternal uncle minister' (*shanglön* (*zhang blon*)), the highest position within the clan aristocracy and the government. The *shanglön* were

[14] Hazod, 'Imperial Central Tibet', p. 224.

[15] See Henri J.M. Claessen and Peter Skalnik, 'The early state: models and reality', in Henri J.M. Claessen and Peter Skalnik (eds), *The Early State* (The Hague, 1978), pp. 637–50.

the product of a centripetal marriage order according to which the *shang* lines appear as bride-givers to the court, alternating in a cycle of five generations, which placed the holy throne in the middle of a continual alliance of relationship.[16] The bride-giver side was traditionally more highly placed, so that the emperor was surrounded by a powerful ring of maternal lines (i.e. lines of the queen mother and the *shang*, maternal uncle), which was likewise characterized by solidarity as well as by a control function in relation to the throne. It appears as if these mechanisms of an 'avuncular order' also operated within the structures of the mobile centre, according to which the geographically alternating visits of the court were occasionally tied to the conclusion of marriage alliances.[17] In the Tibetan context with the patrilocal residence rule, the bride-taking side always comes to the paternal household of the bride to collect her.[18] These principles of postnuptial residence formation contain a political dimension. They are related to the principles of the formation of a governing seat, the model for which we find in the king myth; this is the tale of the mythical progenitor of the royal line, who came down to earth from heaven in order to become the ruler of the land and of the people, and who was received in Yarlung by a local group, the paternal subjects (see above).[19] He comes as a fertilizing rain to the (female) earth, and furnished with magical weapons and the attributes of a demiurge. This foundational narrative reveals the essential contours of the Tibetan 'great man' theory, according to which the formation of a local power is always preceded by the 'invitation' of the

[16] Brandon Dotson, 'A note on *zhang*: maternal relatives of the Tibetan royal line and marriage into the royal family', *Journal Asiatique*, 292, 1–2 (2004): 75–99.

[17] Hugh Edward Richardson, *A Corpus of Early Tibetan Inscriptions*, James G. Forlong Series, 29 (London, 1985), p. 92.

[18] See, for example, Rolf Stein, *Tibetan Civilization* (London, 1972), p. 229.

[19] Guntram Hazod, 'The Falcon and the Lizard – Yar-lung and the cultic history of its royal temple, the "Thundering Falcon"', in Per Kjeld Sørensen and Guntram Hazod (in cooperation with Tsering Gyalbo) (eds), *Thundering Falcon: An Inquiry into the History and Cult of Khra-'brug, Tibet's First Buddhist Temple*, Beiträge zur Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens, 46, Denkschriften der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, 333 (Vienna, 2005), pp. 217–307, at 219f.

ruler or king by a local group.[20] We find these mechanisms repeatedly in the post-imperial period, when on the basis of invitations Buddhist masters founded religiously dominated hegemonies in the old clanscapes.[21] Thus the movements of the *tsänpo*, who in spring and winter each year appeared with his camp as a guest of a different district, are to be seen in the narrower context of a tribal order. Together with the parallel seasonal movements of the assembly (also positioned in the clanscapes), we recognize an overarching mobile centre that was closely connected to the old regional principles.

The Demoness-Tibet Design

With Buddhism, a vision of geopolitical order emerges in Tibet that infiltrates the old territorial identities and to a certain extent was also to reverse them. For the period before the arrival of the new religion the Buddhist discourse classified the 'Snowland' (Gangsjong, i.e. Tibet) as an uncivilized, barbaric satellite that eked out its existence on the outer periphery of the world and the value system emanating from the Buddhist motherland of India. The land was under the rule of bloodthirsty demonesses (the *rakshasi* (T.: *sin* (*srin*)) of Indian cosmology), whose inhabitants were compared to the primitive groups of the Himalayas who were categorized as 'non-human beings' (*mimayin*). This necessitated the appearance of a cult hero who liberated the land; this is the *bodhisattva* and Lord of Compassion Avalokiteshvara, the spiritual son of the Buddha Amitabha, who in the form of a monkey cohabited with a *sin* demoness, created human beings and pushed civilization forward. This relates to the above-mentioned Tibetan anthropogenesis, to which the socio-genetic structure of the ethnic groupings of the Highlands as the people of 'inner Tibet' is linked.[22] Significantly, the narration is located in the home

[20] Charles Ramble, 'Sacral kings and divine sovereigns: principles of Tibetan monarchy in theory and practice', in David Sneath (ed.), *States of Mind: Power, Place and the Subject in Inner Asia* (Bellingham, 2006), pp. 129–49; Hazod, 'The Falcon', p. 237; Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen, *Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham–po*, pp. 27–9.

[21] See Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen, *Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham–po*, pp. 15f., and below, in the section on 'The "Galactic Polity"'.

[22] See above, n. 2.

territory of the Pugyel, in Yarlung, which is precisely to be seen in relation to the developments originating from here as a first place of origin of Tibetan identity.[23] The Lhasa valley is considered to be the centre of the barbarian Snowland, which after the foundation of the Jokhang temple by the *tsänpo* Songtsän Gampo in the seventh century acquired a key position in the Buddhist history of the country. Until the foundation of Samye (Tibet's first monastery in the 770s) the presence of the new religion restricted itself to a symbolic representation in the form of temple foundations and their specific Mahayanistic inventory, in which the *tsänpo* now appeared in the idealization of a 'king of religion' (S. *dharmaraja*, T. *chögyel* (*chos rgyal*)) and world ruler (S. *cakravartin*). Songtsän Gampo was considered the first of the three leading *chögyel* of the imperial period (the other two relate to *tsänpo* of the eighth and ninth century), in whose vitas (written in the early post-imperial period) we find the essential narratives and authoritative programmes for the Buddhization of the country. These narratives emerged in the milieu of the highly ritualized proto-nationalist movements of the eleventh century, the springtime of the Buddhist Renaissance (*phyi dar*) – with the revitalization of the old imperial temples linked with the period of the first *chögyel*. The outline of Tibetan anthropogenesis is one of these reflexive narratives. It has an internal relationship with the similarly widespread account that portrays the spectacular picture of a demoness lying on her back stretched out over the Highlands, on whose limbs (shoulders, elbows, hips, knees, feet) the first temples ascribed to the founder king Songtsän Gampo were positioned (Figure 2.2). This figure is an image of barbarian Tibet and the uncultivated soil, whereas the temples on the demoness symbolize the taming and religious fixing of the body, an image that was synchronized with the processes of the expansion of the empire. The temples are described in a concentric arrangement of twelve 'holding down and boundary-taming temples' of the empire.[24] The Lhasa Temple is positioned

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[23] Hazod, 'The Falcon', pp. 217f.

[24] For a detailed discussion of this tradition, see Sørensen and Hazod, *Thundering Falcon*, pp. 171–215.

at the heart, and thereby signifies its special position as the exemplary centre, from which the empire extended and the Buddhist civilization of the barbarian Highlands started.

Figure 2.2 ***The geography of the Tibet demoness*****, 78 x 165 cm, painting on paper, replica of eighteenth-century original, Tibet Museum, Lhasa. After Sørensen and Hazod,** ***Thundering Falcon*****, p. 208**

Tibet historians such as Rolf Stein and Michael Aris[25] saw in the concentric layout of the imperial temples – according to a current version they are more precisely called the '[four] temples for holding down the [four] horns and [respectively four] for taming the outer and further outlying border areas' (Runön-thadül-yangdül temples) – an imitation of similar models of imperial China. 'The conquering and civilising function of the first [Tibetan] king, once he was established at the centre, was performed in accordance with Chinese ideas; in square concentric zones, each boxed in by the next and extending farther and farther from the centre.'[26] This refers to the five subjugation zones (Ch. *fu*) of the empire, as they are described in the book *Yu Kung* (probably fifth century BCE) with the royal domains at the centre, and followed by several pacified zones, out to the uncultured barbarians.[27] This presumed pattern – an assumption that disregards possible indigenous patterns[28] – confines itself to outward appearances; in its ideal disposition the Runön-thadül-yangdül followed the structure of the mandala cosmology. The Lhasa Jokhang is called the 'tree of life' of the whole of Tibet, a visualization of the exemplary centre as it is laid out in Indian Mount Meru cosmology and is symbolically represented in the central pillar of the temple.[29] The Lhasa *sache* (*sa dpyad*), a term customary in the post-imperial period for the complex geomantic classification of the Lhasa valley, describes a mandala pattern marked in the landscape which is topographically

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[25] Stein, *Civilization*; Michael Aris, *Bhutan: The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom* (Warminster, 1979).

[26] Stein, *Civilization*, p. 39.

[27] Aris, *Bhutan*, p. 18.

[28] Sørensen and Hazod, *Thundering Falcon*, pp. 179–81.

[29] Ibid., p. 175.

demarcated by four mountains. They are considered to be 'supports' of the central temple and the zone they mark is in principle a topographical extension of the foundation of the temple drawn in the form of a mandala. The same mechanism also applies to the outer pacification zones, so that the Runön-thadül-yangdül arrangement is to be read as the spatial transference of the holy district around Lhasa. It represents a 'boundary model' onto which both territorial expansion as well as an internal vertical (political and social order) can be transferred.

The programme underlying the temple scheme is taming and civilizing (*dülba* (*dul ba*)). Within this order it creates new boundaries of identities, which are essentially based on ethical principles and are defined by the relative proximity to the Dharma (the religious law). The barbarian zone, which is at the same time an integral part of this system, lies outside this order. According to the logic of the *dülba* the barbarian on the periphery has an inner relationship to butchers or other groups who as professional exterminators of living beings rank at the lowest step of the social hierarchy.[30] In a spatially concentric transference this model of civilization conceals a certain boundlessness, because the barbarian zone can always theoretically be driven further outwards and correspondingly repeatedly be positioned in relation to the inner space. In fact, there are varying traditions of the Runön-thadül-yangdül pattern that go beyond the group of twelve temples and include further boundary temples along the zones of the expansion of the empire. As a product of the post-dynastic discourse, the written and figurative forms of the demoness-Tibet design include several elements from later epochs, but the beginnings of this temple classification seem to go back at least to the eighth century. It represents a first testimony of the religious fixing of territorial transformations that followed the empire-building – for its part a consequence of the transformation of an originally tribal local power.

A central narrative element in the demoness temple account is the fixing of the ground. It is linked to an older (indigenous) foundation myth, which is related to the apocalyptic narrative of the 'great water', which is widespread in the Highlands and Himalayas. The banishment of

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[30] Hazod, 'The Falcon', p. 294.

the threatening flood (embodied in a demoness) by a demiurge using a magic staff (or another vertical instrument pointing downwards) permits the settlement of the group in the affected area. In the Buddhist accounts the demiurge usually is represented by the figure of Padmasambhava, the 'precious (tantric) master' (Guru Rinpoche), who is supposed to have acted at the court of the *tsänpo* in the second half of the eighth century and who prototypically dominates the whole taming story of the Highlands in its later (Vajrayanistic) form.[31] The essential contours of the foundation myth have already been addressed in the old narrative of the origin and arrival of the mythical progenitor of the royal line, which underlines that the original demiurge is to be identified with the group itself, or the first clan of a settlement area.[32] In this sense, the great demoness, whose body (the earth) lies on the (seething) primal waters, forms an extension and re-dimensioning of regional characteristics. One of the political allegories in the *Old Tibetan Chronicles* that illustrates the size of the Yarlung house and the extent of the empire is the drawing of a symmetrical area, 'Tibet with four enemies on the four borders', over which the 'water of Yarmo' (i.e. the Yarlung River) extends.[33] Tibet, as it were, is the Yarlung on a large scale, in the same way as the god of this land towers over all tribal units (see above). The further development of this basic design in the form of a mandalic fixing of 'holding down' temples also includes the idea of a new form of centralism, which is more static. One finds this realized in the developments of post-imperial Tibet.

The 'Galactic Polity'

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[31] Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen, *Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham–po*, pp. 61–5.

[32] Guntram Hazod, 'The *yul lha gsol* of mTsho yul: on the relation between the mountain and the lake in the context of the 'land god ritual' of Phoksumdo (Northwestern Nepal)', in Anne-Marie Blondeau and Ernst Steinkellner (eds), *Reflections of the Mountain: Essays on the History and Social Meaning of the Mountain Cult in Tibet and the Himalaya*, Veröffentlichungen zur Sozialanthropologie, 2, Denkschriften der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, 254 (Vienna, 1996), pp. 91–114, at 94, 106.

[33] Hazod, 'The Falcon', p. 241.

In the eleventh century, through intensive contacts with Indian masters, a second wave of the spread of Buddhism took place and led to the foundation of schools of orders and of monasteries. The coexistence of equal-ranking monastic rules established on the same ideological principles, which were each based on a union of religious and secular (ancestral) lineages, determined the political landscape of Tibet up until the seventeenth century. The secular lines refer to local rules in the old clan territories whose representatives served as donors and patrons to the monastic seats.[34] Usually the leadership of the religious and secular thrones hailed from the same ancestral lineage. The territory of these hegemonic circles was transregional and consisted of a centre (the mother monastery) and several patchwork branch settlements scattered over the country. The mandala formed the decisive basic model. The application of this symmetrical, holistic model combines cosmological, individual and socio-political dimensions with topographic features. The Tibetans call it *kyilkhor* (*dkyil 'khor*), 'centre and periphery', which in the context of the taming and civilization of the country from one starting point, the seat of the religious founding master, was transferred into the landscape as a 'Buddha field' (or field of civilization). Often these foundation acts were combined with rituals of territorial 'sealing' where the master defined the claimed area as a protection zone for all living beings and placed it under the charge of the (converted) local gods.[35] The central temple, in which the mandala-structured transcendental divine world of the Buddhist pantheon

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[34] In Central Tibet many of the new local rules founded themselves on collateral descendents of the Pugyel line, which in the period of the 'fragmentation of Tibet' (Bö sibu (Bod Sil-bu)) after the collapse of the empire (ninth–tenth century) scattered over the Highlands. The (Buddhist) Guge kingdom in West Tibet (tenth–seventeenth century), which was founded by direct descendents of the royal line together with old *lön* lineages, saw itself as a shifting of the power areas (*ngari* (*mnga' ris*)) of the Pugyel into the west (Tö (*stod*); hence the name Tö Ngari for West Tibet). This *ngari* transfer and continuation also holds in principle for the smaller centres in Central Tibet (Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen, *Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham–po*, pp. 177–97).

[35] Toni Huber, 'Territorial control by "sealing" (*rgya sdom–pa*): a religio-political practice in Tibet', *Zentralasiatische Studien*, 33 (2004): 127–52; Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen, *Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham–po*, pp. 221–4.

was present, formed the ideal centre of these local powers. Its holiness was equally present in the religious throne of the founder, who passed on the spiritual mastery of the opening and realization of the Buddha field within his teacher–pupil line. As the all-embracing spiritual teacher, the master illuminated the secular throne of the founder lines, and often the religious hegemons of medieval Tibet saw themselves as incarnations of the *chögyel* of the imperial period.[36]

In pioneering studies on the pre-colonial Buddhist states in South East Asia, the anthropologist Stanley Tambiah described the nature of the mandala-based polities. The 'galactic polity', as he calls it, 'stands for the arrangement of a centre and its surrounding satellites and is employed in multiple contexts to describe … the structure of a pantheon of gods; the deployment spatially of a capital region and its provinces; the arrangement socially of a ruler, princes, nobles and their respective retinues; and the devolution of graduated power on a scale of decreasing autonomies'.[37] Typical of this arrangement is its reduplication, through which the individual satellites for their part represent duplicates of an exemplary mandala. This allows the political flexibility of the galactic polity, in which theoretically one satellite unit can assume the position of the centre. In the history of post-imperial Tibet, we do in fact have several such changes, where one monastic rule is once positioned peripherally, and at another time shifts to the centre of a supra-regional hegemonial power.[38] The political landscape indicates here a significant interweaving of centralism and regionalism and appears to be a specific feature of pre-modern state structures that goes far beyond Buddhist Asia.[39]

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[36] See, for example, Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen, *Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham–po*, pp. 66f.

[37] Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, 'The galactic polity: the structure of traditional kingdoms in Southeast Asia', *Annals of the New York Academy of Science*, 293 (1977): 69–97, at 79.

[38] Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Kathmandu, 1993), p. 62.

[39] See Tambiah's critical examination of Max Weber's discussion of decentralized forms of 'patrimonialism' (Tambiah, 'Galactic polity', p. 83).

With a view of early Buddhist Central Tibet, we have to recognize the principle of equality of the individual circles as a basic precondition of the galactic policy. In Buddhism there is no charter that envisages a value scale of higher or lower mandalas, just as there is no higher-ranking order. (This is also true of the position of the Dalai Lama, who is not the God King of all Tibetans, but in principle just the leader of a particular order.) Nevertheless, in Tibet in the above-mentioned Lhasa Temple we find a historically developed ideal centre, which through its specific history of a heart temple of the empire and starting point of Tibetan proto-nationalism dominated all others.

The demoness temple account forms a significant part of the legacy bequeathed to the leaders who sought to realize a theocratic state in the seventeenth century: the Dalai Lamas understood themselves as the legitimate heirs both of the 'glorious emperors' and of the later religious hegemons. The Dalai Lama state occupied the 'Lhasa mandala' and established a bureaucratic apparatus, which led to major social changes and to a significant break with the past: the old lineages, the old bond of clan and territory that had marked the polity of the mobile centre and, to a certain extent, the 'galactic polity' of the pre-Dalai Lama era disappeared.[40] Even if they repeatedly exhibited decentralist tendencies in their history, in the former *je* and *lön* lines we can discern the decisive factors for the development of an all-embracing centralism and a 'greater Tibet', whose ethnic reconstruction as a Tibetan identity was fixed through the Buddhist discourse.

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[40] The disappearance of the old clan names and clan identities, however, only relates to Central Tibet, to a certain extent the heartland of the demoness, while in particular marginal zones of the Tibetan cultural area the ancestral lineage is still present in various forms today. Occasionally in the local accounts there is an artificial link with the heartland, for example by the genealogical origin of the group being traced back to prestigious areas (Yarlung, Samye) or to one of the great Central Tibetan lineages. See, for example, Gyalbo, Hazod and Sørensen, *Civilization at the Foot of Mount Sham–po*, p. 206.