

A number of books on Tibet have been published in recent years; most of them are devoted chiefly to religion or to contemporary events. Mr. Shakabpa's study, by contrast, is a balanced presentation of Tibetan political history from earliest times to the present. . . . [It] is a unique contribution to our understanding of Tibet, because his work marks the first time that a Tibetan lay official of high rank has written a study of his own country's political history. He sheds new light on certain significant factors in the evolution of that form of religious government unique in Tibet. In addition, he offers new and interesting evidence, which should help clarify the political status of Tibet in modern times."

In 1959 the Dalai Lama of Tibet, disguised as a peasant and accompanied by a small band of supporters, escaped from the threatening Chinese Communist regime and took refuge in India. The dramatic flight closed a five-hundred-year epoch in which the Tibetan people had lived under the theocratic rule of incarnate lamas and had enjoyed a remoteness, both geographical and spiritual, that was unique. Among those living in exile in India is W. D. Shakabpa, former Minister of Finance, who has now written the first history of Tibet by a Tibetan to be published in English.

In writing this book, the author has drawn on a wealth of previously unused or unavailable materials. As a member of a noble family, he has been close to government officials and high-ranking lamas all his life and has had access to oral information that has hitherto gone unrecorded. His work offers much in the way of raw material for future Tibetan research.

Edited by Turrell V. Wylie, associate professor of Tibetan language and civilization at the University of Washington.

TIBET

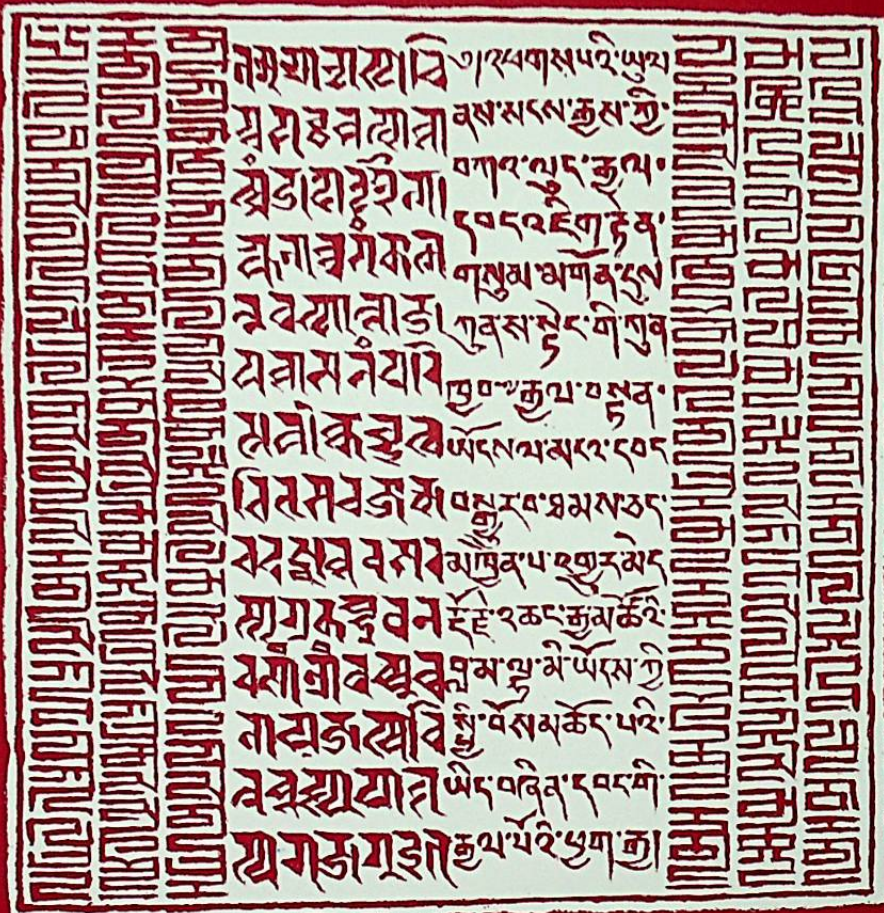
A POLITICAL HISTORY

BY TSEPON W. D. SHAKABPA

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Ruling lamas affixed their seals to official documents to make them valid. The seals had been given to them in turn by the Mongol Khans and the Manchu Emperors. The engraving on this seal of 1909 is in three scripts: (a) the three columns on the left and on the right are in 'Phags-pa script which was devised in the 13th century by 'Phags-pa Lama for Qubilai Khan; (b) the next column on the left consists of the same inscription in *Lantsa*, an ornate Indo-Aryan script used for decorative purposes; and (c) the lines of small characters are proper Tibetan script.

Freely translated, the inscription says:

"Seal of the King of the powerful wish-granting (jewel), who is worshipped by all the gods and men, the Ocean-Lama Vajradhara, the unchangeable all-knowing one who exercises power over all the victorious teaching (of the Buddha), who is the protector of all above earth and of all times, lord of the three worlds and the teachings of the Buddha (which came from) the Glorious Land (i.e. India)."

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DEDICATED

to my fellow countrymen who are suffering immeasurably under Communist Chinese oppression, and who are waiting earnestly for the day when Tibet will regain her freedom and independence.

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Foreword

Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa was born January 11, 1907, in Lhasa. He entered government service at the age of twenty-three and in nine years became Head of the Finance Department, serving concurrently as one of the eight influential spokesmen who presided over the Tibetan National Assembly. In addition to his extensive experience in government, Mr. Shakabpa has traveled abroad. In 1948 he headed the Tibetan Trade Delegation, which traveled around the world.

Following the Communist Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1951, Mr. Shakabpa took up residence in India, where he began work on a study of Tibet's political history. A number of books on Tibet have been published in recent years; most of them are devoted chiefly to religion or to contemporary events. Mr. Shakabpa's study, by contrast, is a balanced presentation of Tibetan political history from earliest times down to the present.

In preparing his book, Mr. Shakabpa has used some fifty-seven original Tibetan sources. Some are rare Tibetan government records; others represent materials not previously cited in English works. It will be noted that when a Tibetan source is cited in a footnote, no page number is given. Although contrary to Western academic methods, this practice is traditional in Tibetan historiography. Beginning with the earliest known Tibetan histories, only the title of a cited work was given—apparently on the assumption that a literate person would be able to locate the page concerned, once he knew which book to read. It was only after working on his history for some time that Mr. Shakabpa came to know the Western method of giving page numbers and publishing data in citations; therefore, his book incorporates the traditional practice for Tibetan sources and the academic method for Western sources. It would have been difficult, if not impossible, for him to rewrite all the citations of Tibetan materials, since some of them were unique government records he copied in Tibet and are no longer available. Moreover, those who read Tibetan will have little difficulty in locating the cited passages; those who do not would find page numbers valueless.

For the convenience of the general reader, Mr. Shakabpa has rendered the Tibetan names phonetically; but aware of their inconsistencies and of the confusion caused by numerous homophones in the Tibetan language, he has wisely included the correct Tibetan orthography for each entry in the Index, as well as in the Bibliography, which will greatly increase the value of his book to the serious student of Tibetan history. The system of orthographic transcription used is that described in T. Wylie, "A Standard System of Tibetan Transcription," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 22 (December 1959), 261-67.

Mr. Shakabpa's book is a unique contribution to our understanding of Tibet, because his work marks the first time that a Tibetan lay official of high rank has written a study of his own country's political history. He sheds new light on certain significant factors in the evolution of that form of religious government unique in Tibet. In addition, he offers new and interesting evidence, which should help clarify the political status of Tibet in modern times.

I first met Tsepon Shakabpa in India in 1960, at which time we discussed at length his work on Tibetan political history. Since then, I have had a continuing interest in his progress, and it is, therefore, with pleasure and a sense of fulfillment that I now have the privilege of writing the foreword to this book, which is the fruition of Mr. Shakabpa's years of work.

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