

THE FALLS OF THE TSANG-PO (SAN-PU), AND IDENTITY OF THAT RIVER WITH THE BRAHMAPUTRA.

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NONE of the trained Indian surveyors, so far as I remember, have yet penetrated to the falls of the great Tsang-po river, in the lower part of its course through Tibet; but by hearsay reports these falls have been placed about 29° 36' N. lat. and 94° 171' E. long., between the districts of Kong-bu and Pema-koi.* Under such circumstances the attached sketch by a Lama artist, who is a native of the last-named district, and who knows the place well, may be interesting; especially as all those Tibetans who have visited the fall, to whom I showed the sketch, recognized the general correctness of its leading features.

For several miles above the falls, the river runs, as already known, in a narrow precipitous defile along which no path is practicable. The falls can only be approached from below the gorge, where, as they form a place of pilgrimage, a rude monastery is located. Their height is estimated at about 70 feet, and they are enveloped, as shown in the picture, by clouds of mist and spray, and the cliffs are covered by subtropical vegetation, and tiger lurk in the neighbourhood.

The local Lamas relate to the awestruck pilgrims that amid the thundering water stands a king-devil of the T'ag-po type, as described and figured by me in my recent book on 'The Buddhism of Tibet,' and hence the place is called "T'ag-po." This devil is placed there under a spell by the Lamas, and when the river is low, the faithful can see his figure looming dimly through the falling waters, as indicated in the picture.

As regards the still unsettled question of the identity of the Tibetan Tsang-po with the Brahmaputra, I have seen no reference, in the bulky publications on the subject, to the evidence afforded by etymology. Now, it is interesting to note that the Tibetan word *Ts'ang-pu* is the literal equivalent of the Sanskrit *Brahmaputra*, and means "the son of Brahma." And a curious Tibetan legend associates Brahmaputra with the Tsang-po river near Lhasa. The legend relates how the son of Thi-srong-deu-tsan,† who reigned about 750 A.D., was drowned in the river, and the king ordered that the river at that spot should receive a certain number of lashes daily, as a punishment for its crime. After a time the spirit of the river, unable to endure any longer such an unjust punishment, appeared before the king in the form of *Brahmaputra*, and besought the king to cast a piece of wood into the river. On this being done, the wood was immediately carried off down stream. In this way the river-spirit showed that the water which drowned the

* See *General Report*, Survey of India Department for 1886-87, Appendix, p. xxix. Pema-koi (Padma-kod) is strictly a fiscal subdivision of Kong-bu district.

† Spelt Khri-srong-deu-tsan.

prince had long since passed on, and that the water now at the spot was wholly innocent of the offence for which it was being whipped.



FALLS OF THE TSANG-FO (SAN-PU).
(From a native Tibetan drawing.)

But as Hindu mythological names, such as Brahma, were unknown to the Tibetans before the reign of Srong-tsan-gam-po in the seventh century, A.D., it is practically certain that this interpretation of the Tibetan word, as synonymous with the Indian god Brahma, is of much more modern date, and is, I think, due to the Lamas, like the Brahmans in regard to many of the vernacular river-names of India, having twisted the native name so as to give it a mythological meaning.

For the common Tibetan name for the river is Tsang-po,* not Ts'ang-pu, and it means "the pure one," which is a common title of rivers in general, and evidently denoting the well-known character of all great rivers to purify themselves quickly from organic contamination. And this river, as the largest river of Central Tibet, is called "*The Tsang-po*" *par excellence*; just as the Ganges and many other great rivers are known to the natives simply as "*the river*." The upper course is called Yaru-Tsang-po, which merely means "*Upper Tsang-po*," and the province through which it here flows is called Tsang.†

Still, it is remarkable to find that the etymology of this river is so near to that of Brahmaputra, and that its root is certainly cognate with that of Brahma.

And in an indigenous work on the geography of Tibet,‡ written about two hundred years ago, the author writes, § that "the rivers of U-Tsang (*i.e.* Central and Western Tibet), on uniting, discharge into the Lohita or the Sita river." The *Lohita* is, of course, a classic Indian name for the Brahmaputra river. The *Sita* possibly is intended for Sadiya, as the Lamas often employ notoriously corrupt forms when dealing with hearsay foreign names, for the Lamaist author is unlikely to have confused it with the Sita river, one of the four great rivers of Hindu myth.

M. OBRUCHEFF'S EXPLORATIONS IN MONGOLIA.¶

THE explorations of the Russian geologist, M. Obrucheff, in Eastern, Central, and South-Eastern Mongolia, throw so much new light on the orographical and geological structure of this region, including the Nan-shan highlands and parts of the Chinese provinces of Han-su and Shen-si, that they well deserve a special notice.

M. Obrucheff started for his journey from Kyakhta, and followed first the usual

* gTsañ-po.

† On the other hand, it is of course possible that this river is named after the province; but improbable, as the word is, as noted, a general title of rivers.

‡ bsTon-pahi-sbyin-bdag-byung-tse'ub, by gLong-rdol Lama, an author who is identified by some with the first Dalai Lama Ngag-wang Lô-zang-Gyat'so—the fifth of the so-called Grand Lamas of Lhasa.

§ gTsaang bdus gnyis kyi chhu 'dree-pa la Lohita chhu-po Sita yang zer (extracted from chapter ii. page 5, of above-noted book).

¶ *Izvestia* of the East Siberian Branch of the Russian Geographical Society, vol. xxiv, part 3-4 (Irkutsk 1893); the Report of the Russian Geographical Society for the year 1893, pp. 12 *seq.*; and *Izvestia* of the Russian Geographical Society, vol. xxx. 1-4 (St. Petersburg, 1894).