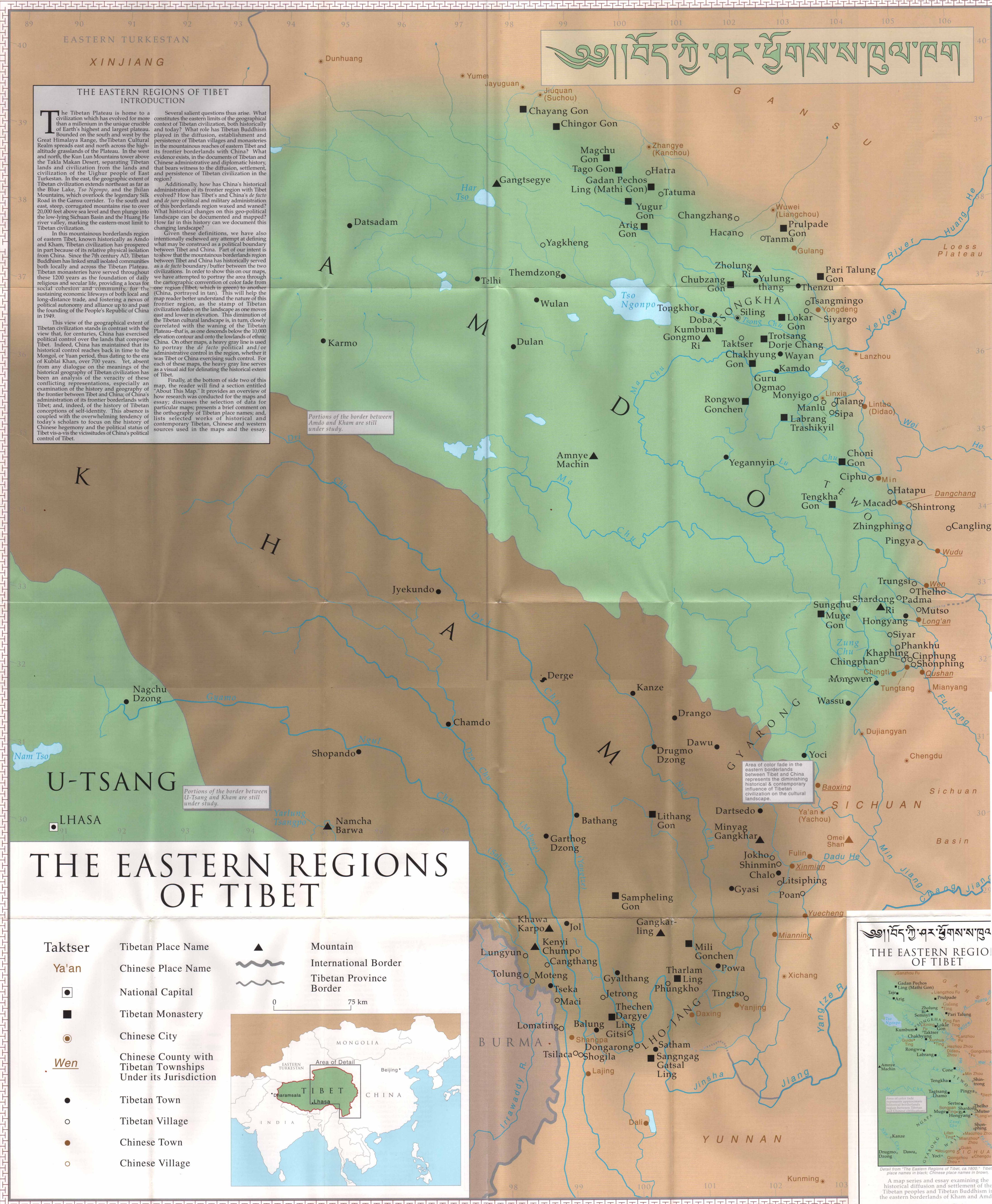




THE EASTERN REGIONS OF TIBET
INTRODUCTION

The Tibetan Plateau is home to a civilization which has evolved for more than a millennium in the unique crucible of Earth's highest and largest plateau. Bounded on the south and west by the Great Himalaya Range, the Tibetan Cultural Realm spreads east and north across the high-altitude grasslands of the Plateau. In the west and north, the Kun Lun Mountains tower above the Takla Makan Desert, separating Tibetan lands and civilization from the lands and civilization of the Uighur people of East Turkestan. In the east, the geographic extent of Tibetan civilization extends northeast as far as the Blue Lake, Tso Ngongpo, and the Jihlan Mountains, which overlook the legendary Silk Road in the Gansu corridor. To the south and east, steep, corrugated mountains rise to over 20,000 feet above sea level and then plunge into the low-lying Sichuan Basin and the Huang He river valley, marking the eastern-most limit to Tibetan civilization.

Several salient questions thus arise. What constitutes the eastern limits of the geographical context of Tibetan civilization, both historically and today? What role has Tibetan Buddhism played in the diffusion, establishment and persistence of Tibetan villages and monasteries in the mountainous reaches of eastern Tibet and its frontier borderlands with China? What evidence exists, in the documents of Tibetan and Chinese administrative and diplomatic history, that bears witness to the diffusion, settlement, and persistence of Tibetan civilization in the region?

Additionally, how has China's historical administration of its frontier region with Tibet evolved? How has Tibet's and China's *de facto* and *de jure* political and military administration of this borderlands region waxed and waned? What historical changes on this geo-political landscape can be documented and mapped? How far in this history can we document this changing landscape?

In this mountainous borderlands region of eastern Tibet, known historically as Amdo and Kham, Tibetan civilization has prospered in part because of its relative physical isolation from China. Since the 7th century AD, Tibetan Buddhism has linked small isolated communities both locally and across the Tibetan Plateau. Tibetan monasteries have served throughout these 1200 years as the foundation of daily religious and secular life, providing a locus for social cohesion and community, for the sustaining economic lifeways of both local and long-distance trade, and fostering a nexus of political autonomy and alliance up to and past the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

This view of the geographical extent of Tibetan civilization stands in contrast with the view that, for centuries, China has exercised political control over the lands that comprise Tibet. Indeed, China has maintained that its historical control reaches back in time to the Mongol, or Yuan, period, thus dating to the era of Kublai Khan, over 700 years. Yet, absent from any dialogue on the meanings of the historical geography of Tibetan civilization has been an analysis of the veracity of these conflicting representations, especially an examination of the history and geography of the frontier between Tibet and China; of China's administration of its frontier borderlands with Tibet; and, indeed, of the history of Tibetan conceptions of self-identity. This absence is coupled with the overwhelming tendency of today's scholars to focus on the history of Chinese hegemony and the political status of Tibet vis-a-vis the vicissitudes of China's political control of Tibet.

Given these definitions, we have also intentionally eschewed any attempt at defining what may be construed as a political boundary between Tibet and China. Part of our intent is to show that the mountainous borderlands region between Tibet and China has historically served as a *de facto* boundary/buffer between the two civilizations. In order to show this on our maps, we have attempted to portray the area through the cartographic convention of color fade from one region (Tibet, which is green) to another (China, portrayed in tan). This will help the map reader better understand the nature of this frontier region, as the stamp of Tibetan civilization fades on the landscape as one moves east and lower in elevation. This diminution of the Tibetan cultural landscape is, in turn, closely correlated with the waning of the Tibetan Plateau—that is, as one descends below the 10,000 elevation contour and onto the lowlands of ethnic China. On other maps, a heavy gray line is used to portray the *de facto* political and/or administrative control in the region, whether it was Tibet or China exercising such control. For each of these maps, the heavy gray line serves as a visual aid for delineating the historical extent of Tibet.

Finally, at the bottom of side two of this map, the reader will find a section entitled "About This Map." It provides an overview of how research was conducted for the maps and essay; discusses the selection of data for particular maps; presents a brief comment on the orthography of Tibetan place names; and, lists selected works of historical and contemporary Tibetan, Chinese and western sources used in the maps and the essay.

Portions of the border between Amdo and Kham are still under study.

Portions of the border between U-Tsang and Kham are still under study.

Area of color fade in the eastern borderlands between Tibet and China represents the diminishing historical & contemporary influence of Tibetan civilization on the cultural landscape.

THE EASTERN REGIONS OF TIBET

Taktser

Ya'an

Wen

Tibetan Place Name

Chinese Place Name

National Capital

Tibetan Monastery

Chinese City

Chinese County with Tibetan Townships Under its Jurisdiction

Tibetan Town

Tibetan Village

Chinese Town

Chinese Village

Mountain

International Border

Tibetan Province Border

0 75 km

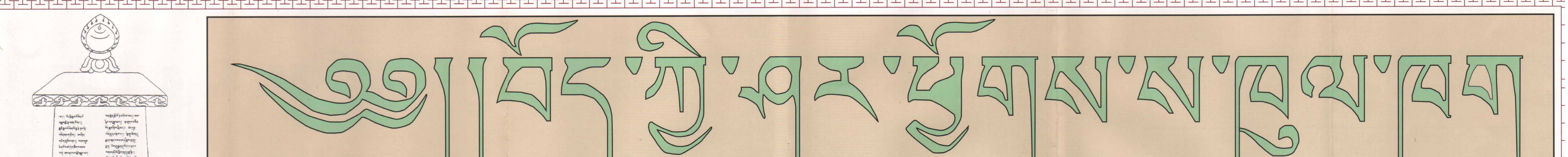
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THE EASTERN REGION OF TIBET

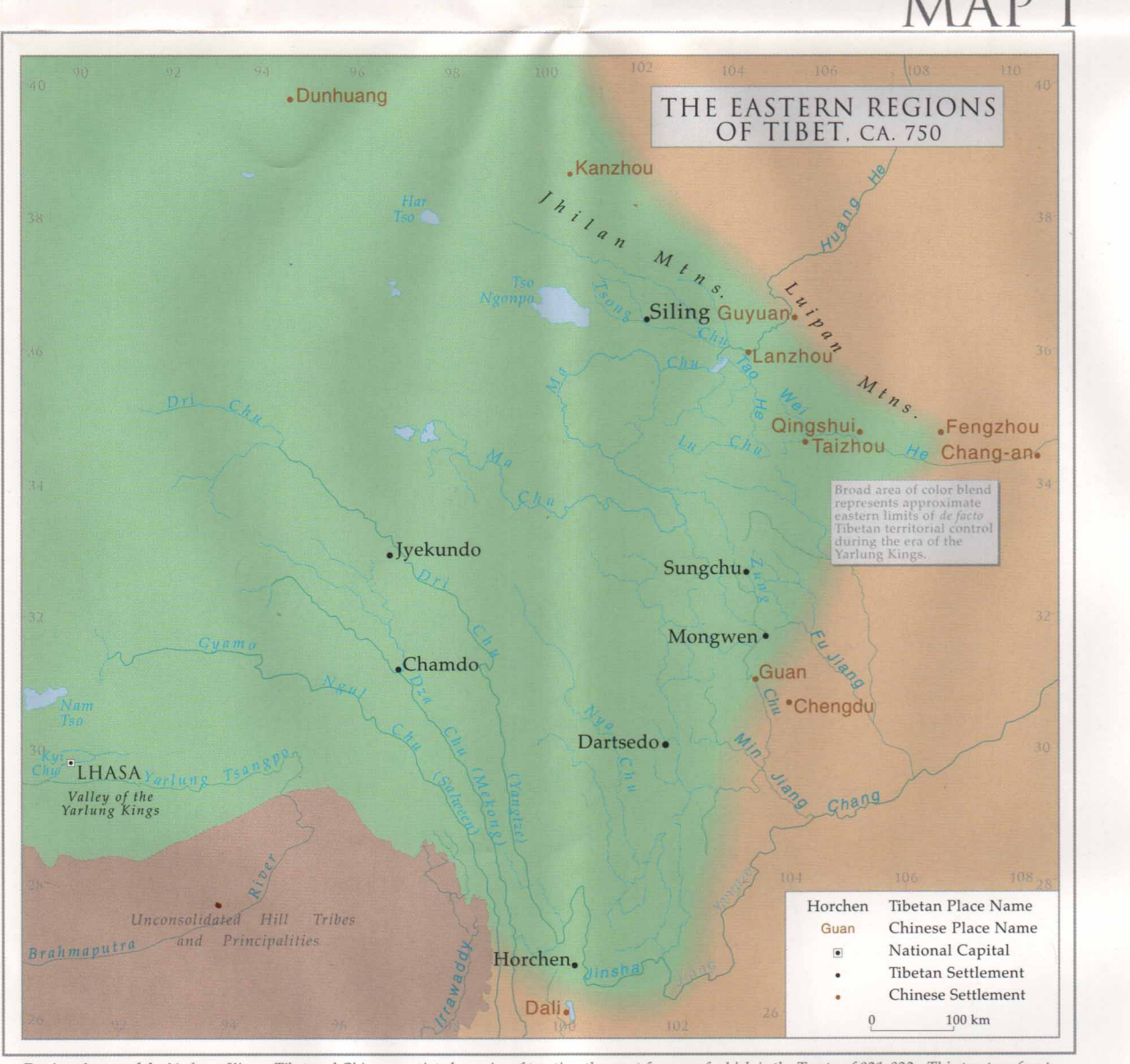
Detail from "The Eastern Regions of Tibet, ca. 1800." Tibet place names in black; Chinese place names in brown.

A map series and essay examining the historical diffusion and settlement of the Tibetan peoples and Tibetan Buddhism in the eastern borderlands of Kham and Amdo.

A Project of Academia Tibetica



Sino-Tibetan Treaty Pillar, AD 821-822
“...both Tibet and China shall keep the country and frontiers of which they are now in possession. The whole region to the east of that being the country of Great China and the whole region to the west being assuredly the country of Great Tibet.”



During the era of the Yarlung Kings, Tibet and China negotiated a series of treaties, the most famous of which is the Treaty of 821-822. This treaty refers to agreed-upon borders between both sides, and uses the seventh such treaty concluded between Tibet and China. The treaty provides the closest reference to a de jure boundary between the two nations. Both Tibet and China shall keep the country and frontiers of which they are now in possession. The whole region to the east of that being the country of Great China and the whole region to the west being assuredly the country of Great Tibet.

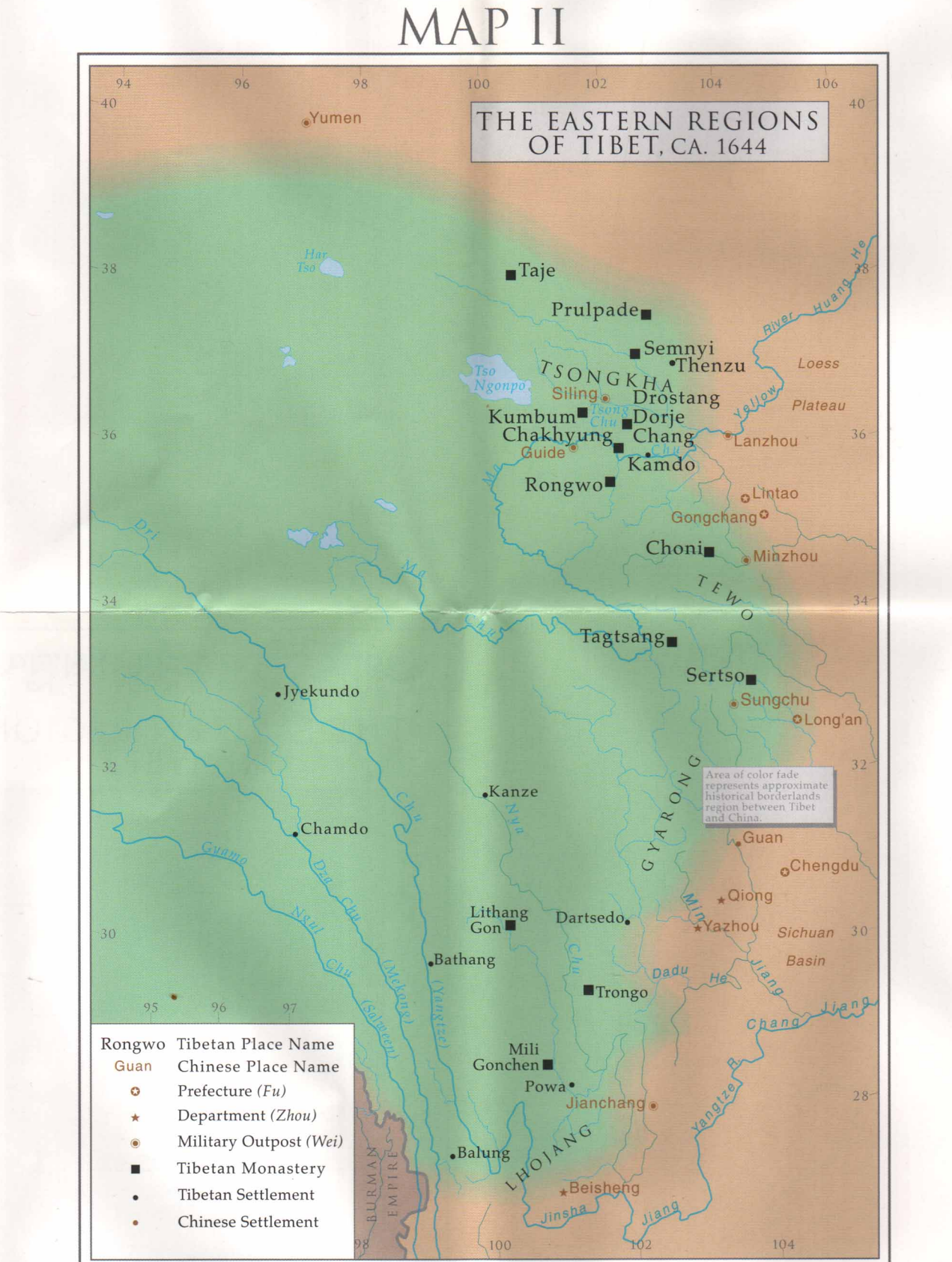
question comprises the valley of the Sung Chu (Min river) that provides direct access for highland Tibetan trade caravans to the fertile Sichuan Basin and the Chinese city of Chengdu. Outside of these two areas the pre-modern extent of dynastic China's territorial administration in Tibet was limited to the posting of small numbers of officials and couriers along only one long-distance trade route, a route which ran from Lhasa to Sichuan.

Current Chinese policy maintains that only communities west of the upper Yangtze drainage were ever part of the effective sphere of political control of the Lhasa-based polity of the Dalai Lamas, a region which was historically comprised of U-Tsang and western Kham, and re-named Xizang-in Chinese. The Tibet Autonomous Region. All Tibetan communities outside of the Tibet Autonomous Region are assumed to have resided within clearly defined borders of Chinese provinces since at least the early 18th century. The recent multi-volume historical atlas series of China (Tan 1987) subscribes to this school of thought, presenting practically the whole of the Tibetan Plateau neatly parceled into administrative divisions under the control of China beginning with the Yuan or Mongol

period in the early 1200s and continuing into the Manchu and Republican eras. In alternative school of thought, however, Chinese conceptions of these historical provincial boundaries on the Tibetan Plateau were largely a cartographic fiction, and were based more on the desire to please pre-conceived imperial territorial ambitions than on any de facto or de jure hegemony in the region. Indeed, when we examine how Tibetans traditionally depicted their world, their writings reveal both how they conceptualized Tibet's regions, and how they related this geographical identity to their lives. These traditional views provide insight into our attempts at delimiting the geographical extent of traditional Tibetan civilization, and, in turn, the historical extent of Amdo and Kham. Thus, before examining this map series of Tibetan inhabitation in the eastern regions of Amdo and Kham, it is instructive to examine Tibetan conceptions of the meaning of Tibet's regions. Two texts are especially relevant to this examination. In 1962, the Tibetologist Turrell Wylie translated into English the section on Tibet in the classic Tibetan world geography book entitled *Dzam gling chen po'i rgyas tsolud snod bucad kun me long zhis bpa ba* (*The Mirror which Illuminates all the Inanimate and Animate*

Things and Explains fully the Great World), hereafter referred to as *The Great World*. Written in 1820 by Lama Tsanpa (1789-1838), an incarnate lama from Amdo, the work is unique because it discusses the geography of Tibet today. The second seminal Tibetan geographical volume is entitled *Dab tser rgya mislo-in* English, the *Chronicle of the Spread of Buddhism in the Domes* [i.e., eastern] Region, written in 1865 by Lama Konchog Tsanpa Rabgye, of Amdo. This latter text deals mainly with the history of Buddhism in Amdo, but it begins with a description of all of Tibet, which concerns us here. It was translated into Chinese in 1989 under the title *Amdo Zhengqiao Shi* (*Political and Religious History of Amdo*).

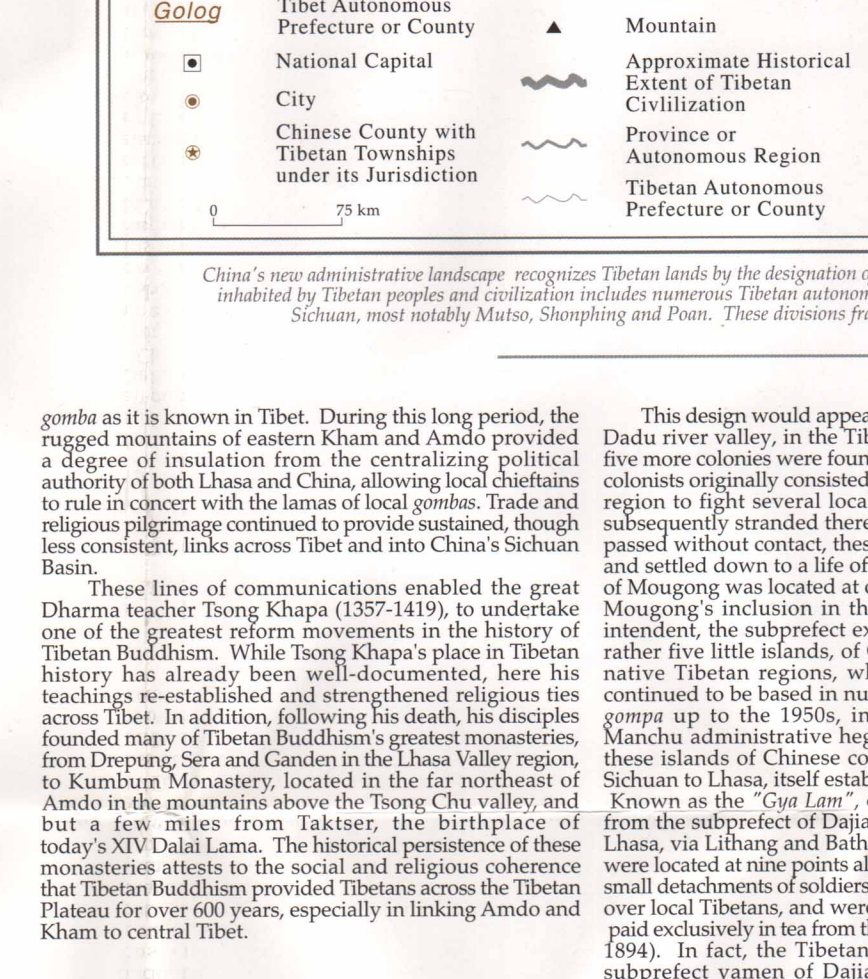
Both of these texts refer to Tibet as consisting of three main regions, an upper, middle and lower corresponding to western, central and eastern Tibet, respectively. *The Great World* lists this western region as *Id* (i.e. above, or in the west) *Nga ri kor sum*; in the *Spread of Buddhism* it is described simply as *Nga ri*. Both texts refer to the middle region as *Bar* (i.e. in the middle) *U-Tsang ri ni*, while the eastern region is also referred to in both texts as *Med* (i.e. down, or in the east)



Despite the collapse of the Tibetan empire of the Yarlung Kings, Buddhism continued to flourish in northeastern Tibet, eventually enabling the Dharma teacher Tsong Khapa (1357-1419), to undertake one of the greatest reform movements in the history of Tibetan Buddhism. This movement's teachings re-established and strengthened religious ties across Tibet and led to the founding of many of Tibetan Buddhism's largest monasteries, from Drepung, Sera and Ganden in the Lhasa Valley region, to Kumbum Monastery, located in the far northeast of Amdo in the mountains above the Tsong Chu valley, and but a few miles from Takster, the birthplace of today's XIV Dalai Lama.

Do Kham gang drug. Today, Tibetans still refer to themselves as from one of these three traditional macro-regions, even though a more localized regional identity based on an agricultural valley or pastoral grassland is used by Tibetans for day-to-day identity. Additionally, few Tibetans refer to themselves as from *Do-Kham*; rather, they will usually identify either Kham or Amdo as their home. In the mid-1800's, the term *Do-Kham* would thus appear to

have been a synthesis of the two main Tibetan regions of Kham and Amdo that border upon China. Further insight into how these writers conceptualized Kham and Amdo as separate regions from the larger region of *Do-Kham* is made clear through the listing of specific river valleys and mountain ranges that comprise the heartland of Kham—today composed of western Sichuan province and the eastern boundary region of the



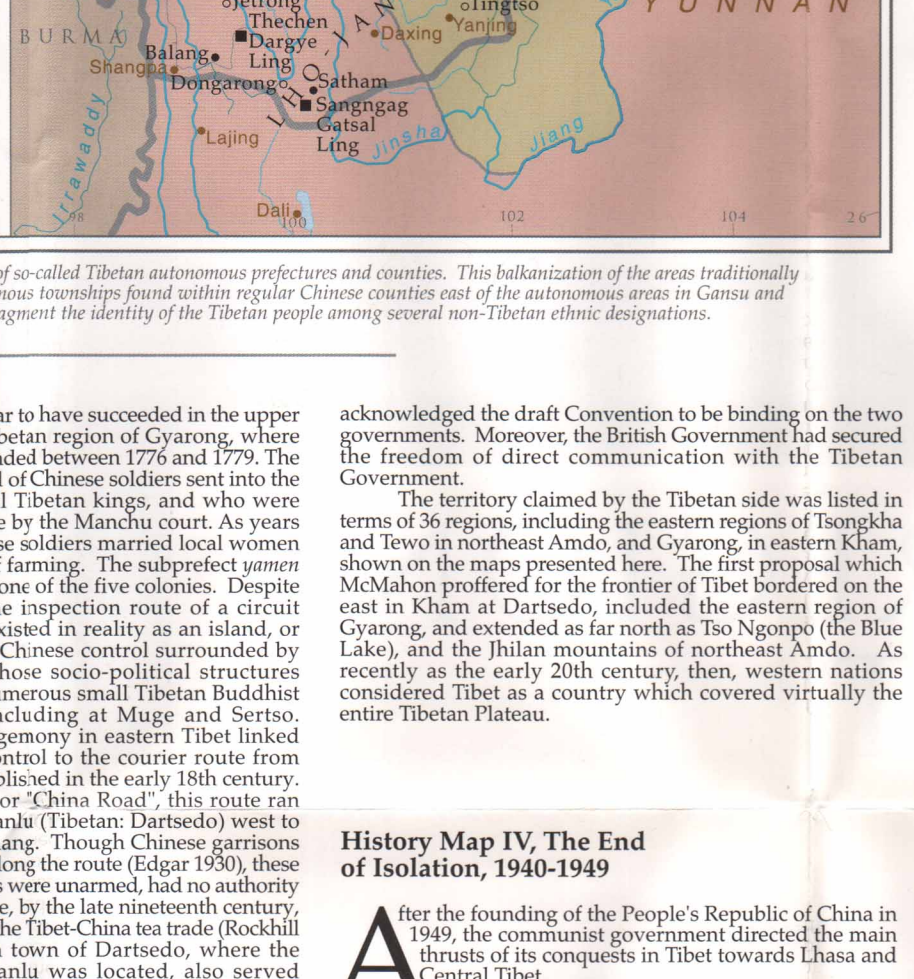
China's new administrative landscape recognizes Tibetan lands by the designation of so-called Tibetan autonomous prefectures and counties. This balkanization of the areas traditionally inhabited by Tibetan peoples and civilization includes numerous Tibetan autonomous townships found within regular Chinese counties east of the autonomous areas in Gansu and Sichuan, most notably Mutsu, Shongphing and Powa. These divisions fragment the identity of the Tibetan people among several non-Tibetan ethnic designations.

History Map III, the Western Extent of the Manchu Empire, ca. 1800

When the Manchus invaded China and established the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) they established a new frontier policy regarding Tibet and, especially, the mountainous borderlands of eastern Kham and Amdo. Being themselves a people with a nomadic past, the Manchus recognized the Tibetan and Mongolian peoples might pose a threat to their empire, based at the time on the great population centers of eastern, agrarian China. Though the Manchus' territorial administration into Tibetan lands was still limited to the main avenues of economic exchange that the Ming had established on a limited scale, several capable emperors ruled Tibet and China than ever before. Despite this increased presence, after about 1800, this trade-route system was kept operational mainly due to the continuing support of local Tibetan officials and chieftains.

Four levels of Chinese territorial administration existed below the imperial capital, a system which left its stamp in the eastern regions of Amdo and Kham. First, a province was under a governor, or governor-generalship. The next level consisted of a circuit, or *dao*. Prefects, county magistrates and other officials below the prefect level were directly accountable to the circuit intendant for a wide range of civil and military affairs. Also, the circuit was primarily responsible for diplomatic relations with foreigners. A logical argument may be made that eastern Tibetan communities not included within the range of the circuit intendant's inspections were independent of Chinese control.

Within this administrative framework, agricultural colonies were founded in parts of the Min and Dadu river valleys during the eighteenth century. Just to the west of Lianfong, on the upper reaches of the Min watershed, five colonies (*tun*) were founded in 1757. The *tun-tun*, or "colony-field" system, had been utilized by the Chinese empire for over two millennia as a way to establish self-sufficient Han Chinese communities in remote border regions. Although surrounding local people and their daily lifeways were not controlled by the colonies, the system did act to lessen the chances of strong local chieftains establishing themselves as a threat to China's borders and economic activities.



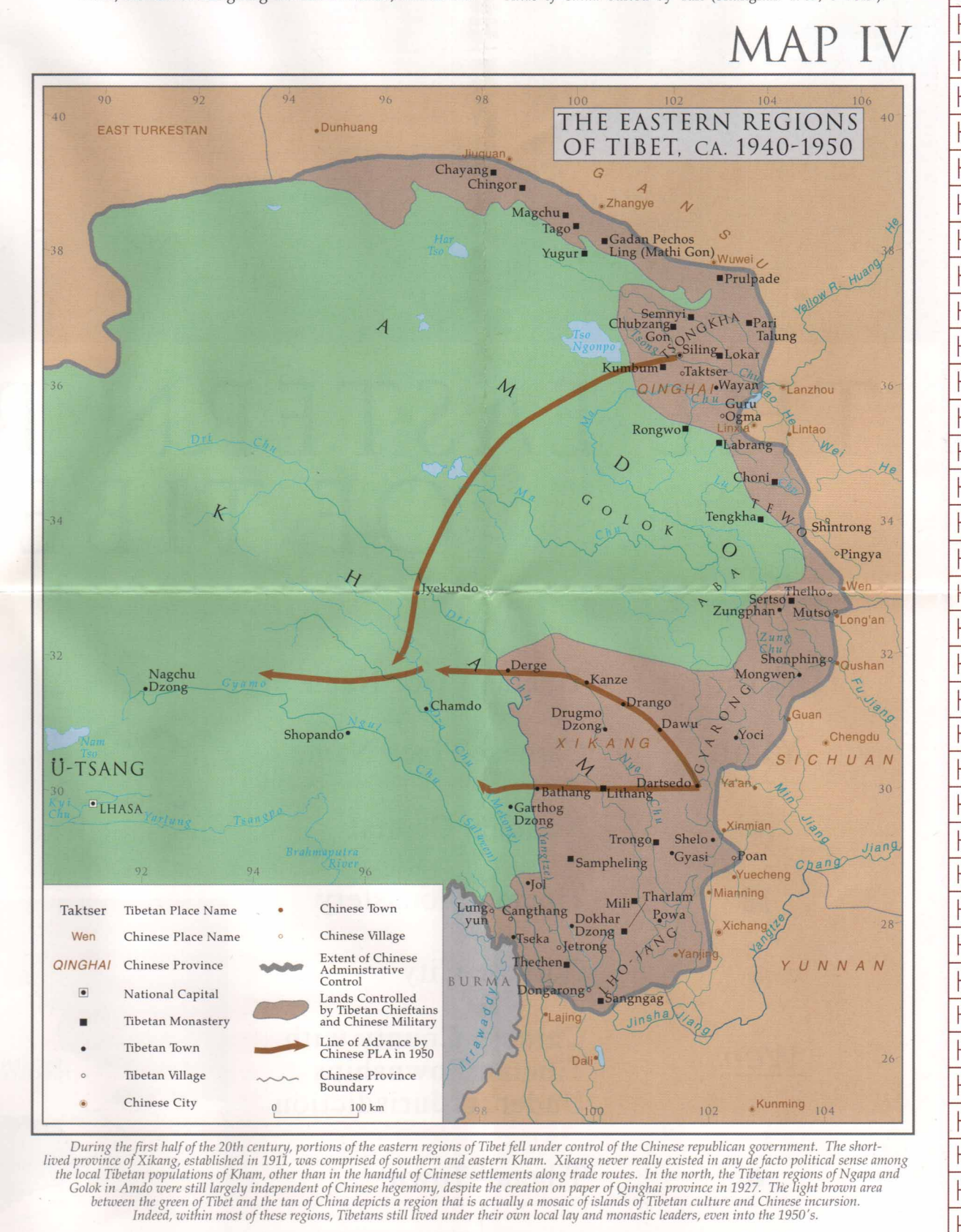
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History Map IV, The End of Isolation, 1940-1949

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the communist government directed the main thrusts of its conquests in Tibet toward Lhasa and Central Tibet.

Map IV shows how this initial expansion in the extension of China's administrative and political hegemony along traditional trade routes from Amdo and Kham towards Central Tibet. Yet, despite the arrival in Lhasa of Chinese troops in 1950 along these occupied trade routes, communist China still exercised little direct control over vast sections of both Amdo and Kham. Indeed, while the short-lived Chinese occupation of Kham and the Muslim warlordism in the valley of the Dza Chu (Mekong River), and in Zhongdian, located in the valley of the Dri Chu (Yangtze River).

Further evidence of the historically enduring character of eastern Tibetan regions, and how they are considered part of Tibet by the Tibetan people, may be seen in the formal boundary claim in the Tibetan state during the Simla Conference. Organized and conducted by the British Indian government in 1913-14, the Simla Conference was primarily concerned with keeping Tibet as a *de facto* buffer state between China and India after the fall of the Manchu empire in 1911. Considerable effort was expended by the British to get the Tibetan and Chinese sides to agree upon a mutual boundary. In the end, however, the Chinese delegate, Chen Yixun, only initiated a text of a tripartite convention, which was immediately repudiated by the new government of the Chinese Republic of President Yuan Shikai. Britain and Tibet were left with no alternative but to proceed without Chinese participation. Sir H. McMahon, president of the Simla Conference, along with Tibet's representative, Ngawang Gyatso, signed a joint Anglo-Tibetan Declaration which



When the Manchus invaded China and established the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) the government established a new frontier policy regarding Tibet by founding agricultural colonies in parts of the Min and Dadu river valleys during the eighteenth century. This system, known as the *tun-tian*, or "colony-field" system, had been utilized by the Chinese empire for over two millennia as a way to establish self-sufficient Han Chinese communities in remote border regions. Manchu administrative hegemony over Tibet ended these islands of Chinese control to the courier route from Sichuan to Lhasa, itself established in the early 18th century. Known as the "Gya Lam", or "China Road", this route ran from the subject of Dajianlu (Tibet: Dartsedo) west to Lhasa, via Lithang and Bathang. Though Chinese garrisons were located at one of the five colonies, these small detachments of soldiers were unarmed, had no authority over local Tibetans, and were, by the late nineteenth century, paid exclusively in tea from the Tibet-China tea trade (Rockhill 1894).

Contemporary Chinese administrative boundaries are derived from various provincial maps. The PRC Administrative Division Handbook (*Xingsheng Qu Hua fangceng*; Beijing: 1995) also provided important information. The *Sino-Tibetan Atlas Series* compiled by Peter Kessler (*Laufende Arbeiten zu einem Ethnohistorischen Atlas Tibets*; Tibet Institute, Rikon/Zurich) was invaluable. Three volumes covering parts of Kham in an attempt to date Ling and Derge (vol. 40, 1983); Tebor (vol. 41, 1984); and Muli (vol. 47, 1982). Five additional works proved valuable. These include LH. Edgards' *The Old Courier Service Between Tachienlu and Lhasa*, *Journal of the West*

China Border Research Society, #4, pp. 9-13, published in 1930; Joseph Fletcher (1978) *China Inner Asia*, ca. 1800, in *The Tibetan Regions of Qinghai*, vol. 10, pp. 35-106; Y.H. Pan (1992) *The Sino-Tibetan Treaties in the Tang Dynasty*; *Toung Pao*, #128 pp. 116-161; Hugh E. Richardson, 1972 *The Sino-Tibetan Treaty Inscription of AD 821-823 at Lhasa*, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, #2, pp. 137-162; and, William W. Rockhill (1894) *History of a Journey Through Mongolia and Tibet in 1891 & 1892*.

Academia Tibetica is a working group of scholars and institutions devoted to critically examining historical and contemporary questions on land and life in the greater Tibetan region.

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