

## Some Reflections on the Periodization of Tibetan History\*

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**H**istory is always expressed as a narrative, a story about the past. To write a story out of the events of the past, historians must give those events a coherent meaning and plot those meaningful events as chapters in a larger narrative. This means that the method of writing history is not simply the recording of a series of past events, or a set of dates. Such a record would not be a history but a mere chronology, and history is never just a chronicle of dates. Historiography, the study of history and the methods employed in how individuals, or a community of people, or a culture come to understand the past and articulate that understanding, presupposes that history by necessity, whether we prefer this or not, is always written in chapters. Periodization — the breaking-up of the past into chapters, or “periods” — is one necessary way historians make sense of the past and also write history.

The question of periodization, however, is one of those topics in historiography that generates fierce debates and can create, and certainly has created, much controversy. The problem of periodization is precisely this problem of how best to characterize and interpret the chapters in a coherent story of the past. As many insightful historians have warned over the years, the articulation of historical periods may indeed be arbitrary and artificial, but rarely is such articulation a neutral, unambiguous, and value-free enterprise.

Having heeded this warning, I choose in this brief essay — perhaps unwisely — to charge headlong into this academic mine-field where success is not only risky, but far from guaranteed. I want to do this because, in my opinion, there has not been much sustained reflection on the critical question of periodization in the historical study of Tibet, despite an ever increasing scholarly interest in Tibetan history and historiographical issues. I see this lack of serious historiographical reflection as one unfortunate consequence of a long-standing and predominant inclination among scholars in Tibetan studies to be concerned only with the development of Buddhism and Buddhist thought in Tibet.

For several generations now, the question of periodization has been dealt with critically, with varying degrees of success, in other related fields of Asian studies, including China, Japan, and India.<sup>1</sup> And, of course, in

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<sup>1</sup> Exemplary surveys of the issue of periodization in Chinese studies include Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (Stanford, 1973); Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization* (Cambridge, 1982), esp. pp. 22-25; J.A.G. Roberts, *A Concise History of China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1999); James H.Y. Tai and Marjorie K.M. Chan, “Some Reflections on the Periodization of the Chinese Language,” in *Studies in Chinese Historical Syntax and Morphology: Linguistic Essays in Honor of Mei Tsu-lin*, Alain Peyraube and Chaofen Sun, eds. (Paris, 1999), pp. 223-239; in Japanese studies, see John Whitney Hall, “Terms and Concepts in Japanese Medieval History: An Inquiry into the Problems of

European studies, the issue is an old one and has been debated for a century or more.<sup>2</sup> But, notwithstanding the major contributions made by scholars of Tibet past and present, it is my contention, unfortunately, that Tibetanists have tended to reflect far too little on what they do as scholars of history, and how historians of Tibet and Tibetans themselves, have divided and articulated Tibet's past into discrete periods. Even though Tibetanists continue to generate and repeat various divisions of time whenever writing about Tibet — whether writing about Buddhist history or the meaning of Buddhism in Tibet or about Tibetan social and political history — Tibetanists rarely, if ever, take up the question of periodization. For whatever reason, few have been willing to openly consider this question or acknowledge that the persistent articulation and interpretation of the periods of Tibetan history, which have generally been accepted uncritically, may still be in need of reassessment.

What follows are just a few remarks intended hopefully to generate some discussion and perhaps even a few constructive debates. I should make clear at the outset that whenever I use the term “Tibet” here, I am referring only to the central and western regions traditionally and collectively called Dbus-gtsang and not to the wider Tibetan-speaking communities beyond this regional boundary, such as the eastern provinces of Khams and A-mdo (the present-day west China provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan).

All concepts of periodization, of temporal divisions, are founded on theoretical interpretations of continuity and change. For the purposes of narrative coherence and convenient presentation, historical periods must be distinguished by clearly articulated long-term continuities and the break-up of these continuities by times of transition between periods. The debates over periodization tend always to flare up around where one chooses to locate the transition points rather than how one describes the continuities. The reason this is so is that the transitions and divisions of time always reflect the value judgments and priorities of the classifiers, and those judgments and priorities are often challenged by alternative judgments and priorities. Even when some consensus of agreement is reached on the extent of a period or a point of change, the temporal divisions generated by the interests and priorities of historians working even in the same area are not always articulated uniformly. One group of Tibetan historians, for example, might identify a span of time as the time when so-and-so was in control or doing such-and-such, while another group of scholars might classify a stretch of time when some social, religious, or political movement prevailed, or when an artistic style or literary work was introduced, or when a certain

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Translation.” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 9.1 (1983): 1-32; Jeffrey P. Mass, *Antiquity and Anachronism in Japanese History* (Stanford, 1992); in Indian studies, see Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Romila Thapar, eds., *Situating Indian History* (Delhi, 1986); Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (Delhi, 1994); Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations* (London, 1996) and *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300* (Berkeley, 2002), esp. pp. 1-36.

<sup>2</sup> Debates about periodization in European studies began in earnest in the nineteenth century. For a helpful overview of the development of these debates, see William A. Green, “Periodization in European and World History.” *Journal of World History* 3.1 (1992): 13-53. For recent reflections on several key approaches to dividing up and interpreting the past from the point of view of European and American historiography, see Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London, 2000), pp. 114-140.

significant event took place. Problems arise when historians require commitment to a particular period scheme as reflecting some sort of metaphysics or ontology, which by definition would invalidate all alternative schemes.<sup>3</sup> The reality, of course, is that organizing the past is necessarily an exercise in interpretation and there is always room for other interpretations. In general, then, rival schemes for dividing up time should not, and indeed cannot, cancel each other out.

We must bear in mind this flexibility of historical interpretation when considering how periods of continuity and change in Tibetan history have been articulated both by Tibetan historians and by scholars of Tibet. I would like to examine briefly below a few of the exemplary periodizations of Tibetan history that have been presented. I will limit my comments to these few indigenous Tibetan schemes, since these by and large continue to serve as a basis for the various periodizations employed by European and American scholars of Tibet.

It is often remarked that Tibetans, like the Chinese, have tended toward a certain preoccupation with history. From the late tenth century onward in Tibet, we see an increased concern for history and historical writing and find ample evidence for the emergence of a truly Tibetan indigenous historiography.<sup>4</sup> Such an interest in history appears for the most part to be based on concerns for legitimizing claims to religious authority, but I want to suggest also that this move to lay claim to the authority of history may also have been a response to very real sociopolitical conflicts and local institutional interests. The Tibetan histories that began to appear from this time onward organized the past according to two basic schemes, one in which Buddhist history claimed primacy in determining the divisions of time and another in which political history, or more accurately imperial and later local institutional history, assumed priority.

The periodization of Tibetan history in Buddhist terms was not new. In some of the old Tibetan chronicles unearthed from Dunhuang,<sup>5</sup> for example, we find Tibetan religious history divided into four periods: 1. the period of pre-history when Tibetans were characterized as savage barbarians before imperial authority emerged and before Buddhism was introduced to Tibet; 2. the period of the Buddhist "kings" (*btsan-po*) from the seventh through mid-ninth century, inaugurated by the emperor Srong-btsan-sgam-po, perceived to be an incarnation of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, when

<sup>3</sup> By "metaphysics" or "ontology" here I mean to imply a conception of history in which a specific division of time is held to be objectively established, as "just the way it is." In this sense, a metaphysical or ontological conception of the past is one that views historical constructs such as periodization as unconditionally given and fails to acknowledge the merely conceptual or heuristic nature of such constructs.

<sup>4</sup> On the early developments of Tibetan historiography, see the insightful discussions in Matthew Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversions, Contestations, and Memory* (New York, 2000), chaps. 2-4.

<sup>5</sup> Much of what scholars know of the ancient Tibetan empire has depended to a great extent on the manuscripts recovered from Dunhuang and preserved at both the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Pelliot Collection) and the British Library in London (Stein Collection). Materials for the study of these important texts can be found in Marcelle Lalou, *Inventaire des manuscrits tibétains de Touen-houang conservés à la Bibliothèque Nationale. Fonds Pelliot tibétains*. 3 volumes (Paris, 1939-61); Jacques Bacot, F.W. Thomas, and Ch. Toussaint, *Documents de Touen-houang relatifs à l'histoire du Tibet* (Paris, 1940); Spanien Macdonald and Yoshiro Imaeda, *Choix de documents tibétains conservés à la Bibliothèque nationale*. 2 volumes (Paris, 1978-79).

Buddhism as a civilizing force was first brought to Tibet; 3. the period of darkness and chaos beginning with the persecutions of Buddhism by the evil emperor Glang-dar-ma and the collapse of Buddhist imperial authority; and finally 4. the period of Buddhist renaissance in Tibet beginning in the late tenth century.<sup>6</sup>

This four-fold model of Tibetan history was widely used in succeeding centuries, though occasionally modified and re-cast in either a three-fold or a two-fold scheme. Perhaps the earliest example of a three-fold periodization of Tibetan Buddhist history is the brief thirteenth-century historical work of the Bka'-gdams-pa scholar Bcom-ldan Rig-pa'i-ral-gri, the *Ornamental Flower of the Buddha's Teaching* (*Thub-pa'i bstan-pa rgyan-gyi me-tog*) composed in 1261.<sup>7</sup> Here we see the familiar religious ordering of historical time emphasizing the spread of Buddhist doctrine in Tibet. Thus, we have: 1. the period of the "early spread of the Buddhist teachings" (*bstan-pa snga-dar*),<sup>8</sup> beginning with the miraculous landing of certain Buddhist sutras and other sacred objects on the palace roof at Yum-bu Gla-sgang during the reign of the emperor Lha Tho-tho-ri-gnyan-btsan (b. c. 460) and continuing on through the reigns of the famous Buddhist kings of Tibet, Srong-btsan-sgam-po (c. 610-649/50), Khri-srong-lde-btsan (r. 755/56-797), and so forth; 2. the period of the "interim spread of the Buddhist teachings" (*bstan-pa bar-dar*), beginning with the emperor Ye-shes-'od in western Tibet and highlighted by the Buddhist translation activities of Rin-chen-bzang-po (958-1055); and finally, 3. the period of the "later spread of the Buddhist teachings" (*bstan-pa phyi-dar*), associated with the new wave of Buddhist translators beginning with 'Brog-mi Lo-tsā-ba (992-1074).

The earliest Tibetan Buddhist historians of a two-fold periodization system — essentially identical to the one adopted by Bcom-ldan Rig-pa'i-ral-gri but with the omission of an independent middle period (*bstan-pa bar-dar*) — include such Buddhist luminaries as Sa-skya Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan (1146-1216), Ne'u (Nel-pa) Paṇḍita (thirteenth century), and Bu-ston (1290-1364).<sup>9</sup> These early Buddhist historians of Tibet clearly demonstrated familiarity with varied concepts of periodization, all based, however, on interpretations of discreet moments in time of religious transformation and transition. Their Buddhist concept of history emphasized the spread of Buddhist doctrine, and more precisely the transmission and diffusion of translations of Buddhist scripture. From a historiographical standpoint, one

<sup>6</sup> Rolf A. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*. Translated J.E. Stapleton Driver (Stanford, 1972), p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> Rig-pa'i-ral-gri, *Thub-pa'i bstan-pa rgyan-gyi me-tog* (Nepal National Archives; reel no. L493/2). My thanks to Kurtis Schaeffer for introducing me to this little-known work and for sharing with me his notes on the text.

<sup>8</sup> For a brief but detailed account of the politics of this period, see Hugh Richardson, "Political Aspects of the *Snga-dar*, the First Diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet," in *High Peaks, Pure Earth: Collected Writings on Tibetan History and Culture* (London, 1998), pp. 196-202; see now also Ronald M. Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture* (New York, 2005), pp. 61-83.

<sup>9</sup> Sa-skya Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan, *Bod-kyi-rgyal-rabs*, in *Sa-skya-pa'i Bka'-'bum* (Tokyo, 1968), vol. 4, pp. 295-296, trans. in Giuseppe Tucci, "The Validity of Tibetan Historical Tradition," in *India Antiqua: A Volume of Oriental Studies Presented by His Friends and Pupils to Jean Philippe Vogel, C.I.E., on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of His Doctorate* (Leiden, 1947), pp. 309-322; Ne'u (Nel-pa) Paṇḍita Grags-pa-smon-lam-blo-gros, *Sngon-gyi-gtam me-tog phreng-ba*, in *Rare Tibetan Historical and Literary Texts from the Library of Tsepon W.D. Shakabpa* (New Delhi, 1974); and Bu-ston, *Bu-ston chos-'byung* (Beijing, 1988), trans. E. Obermiller, *History of Buddhism in India and Tibet* (1932, Reprint, Delhi, 1986).

of the unfortunate consequences of these traditional Buddhist periodizations of Tibetan history is that the rather minimal division of time, marked only by the birth, decline, and rebirth of Buddhist teachings in Tibet, overemphasizes the significance of Buddhist doctrine, oversimplifies the sociopolitical factors causing change, and imposes restrictions on any historian who wishes to articulate a more far-sighted and deeply textured historical narrative of Tibet's past.

As an alternative to this oversimplified religious ordering of history, Tibetan historians have also conceived of continuity and change in political terms and identified periods based on the formation and disintegration of particular regional and institutional hegemonies. Barring evidence in the early Tibetan histories of an explicit interest in the imperial succession of Tibet's royal lineage, we see the primacy of politics in determining historical periods appearing rather late in Tibetan historiographical literature. Though we still find embedded in these later histories the skeletal system of the two-fold *snga-dar* / *phyi-dar* division, usually with an imprecisely dated "dark period" located between the two,<sup>10</sup> the later Tibetan historians' orientations to the past are dominated by the identification of particular regional — albeit religious — hegemonic powers and their shift from one locus to another. One fine example of this type of periodization can be found in the nineteenth-century history of Guru Bkra-shis.<sup>11</sup> At the conclusion of the sixth chapter of this monumental work — a chapter surveying the history of the major Rnying-ma-pa institutions in central, southern, and eastern Tibet and, I might add, a chapter in desperate need of a full critical study in and of itself —, Guru Bkra-shis discusses in two separate sections the history of the kings of Sde-dge and the historical rulers of central Tibet.<sup>12</sup> In the latter section, the author employs a scheme for dividing the history of central Tibet into discreet periods defined by the consolidation, fragmentation, and reconstitution of various politico-religious forces and the institutions driving them.

In Guru Bkra-shis's approach to organizing Tibetan history, the past is divided into as many as eleven distinct periods, each characterized by a consolidated axis of power located in a specific time and region. Thus, to mention just a few examples, we have the period of the early kings situated in the Yar-lung valley during the early seventh to late eighth century, or the period of Sa-skya authority, dating from 1268 to 1349, and consolidated at the noble hereditary and monastic estate of Sa-skya, but extending well beyond its frontiers to the remote Mongol court of Kubilai Khan. Then again, we have the period of the early Dga'-ldan Pho-brang established in 1642 with the rise to power of the fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682), and ending in 1705 with the assassination of the Dalai Lama's regent, Sde-srid Sangs-

<sup>10</sup> This mysterious middle period, the so-called "dark age" in Tibetan history, has been described also by Tibetan historians as a "period of fragmentation" (*sil-bu'i dus*). See, for example, Nor-brang O-rgyan, *Bod sil-bu'i byung-ba brjod-pa shel-dkar phreng-ba* (Lhasa, 1991); also Thub-bstan-phun-tshogs, "Bod sil-bu'i skabs-kyi dus-tshigs 'ga'-zhig-la dpyad-pa," in *Krung-go'i bod-kyi shes-rig* 1 (1990): 57-62.

<sup>11</sup> *Gu-bkra'i chos-byung* [=Bstan-pa'i snying-po gsang-chen snga'-gyur nges-don zab-mo'i chos-kyi byung-ba gsal-bar byed-pa'i legs-bshad mkhas-pa dga'-byed ngo-mtshar gtam-gyi rol-mtsho] (Beijing, 1990) (henceforth, GKCB).

<sup>12</sup> GKCB, pp. 648-938, esp., pp. 922-935 and 935-938. See also, Dan Martin, "A Brief Political History of Tibet By Gu-ru Bka-shis," in *Tibetan History and Language: Studies Dedicated to Uray Géza on His Seventieth Birthday*, E. Steinkellner, ed. (Vienna, 1991), pp. 329-351.

rgyas-rgya-mtsho (1653-1705), by the orders of the militant Lha-bzang Khan, ruler of the Qoshot Mongol regime in Lhasa. Guru Bkra-shis's periodization of Tibetan history ends in 1813 when he finished editing the full work. In Guru Bkra-shis's own terms, the completion of the work took place in the period of the regency (*rgyal-tshab*) of the incarnate successors of De-mo Rin-po-che as de-facto rulers of Tibet.<sup>13</sup>

Following the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Tibetan historical studies in contemporary Tibet and China has become a flourishing academic discipline. In the PRC, conceptions of the periodization of Tibet's past tend to be dominated by conflicting interpretations of the socioeconomic characteristics of each historical period. Although political history still claims primacy in recent Tibetan attempts to divide periods of time, many Tibetan and Chinese historians prioritize a social-scientific approach following a Marxist teleological interpretation, and focus on how Tibetan society can best be understood in a Communist historical framework. For these historians, the issue of periodization is inextricably bound up with Marxist historiography and much effort is expended in articulating the transformation and transitions of pre-Communist Tibet from a slave society to a feudalist one.<sup>14</sup> At this point I do not wish to enter into a discussion of the so-called "feudalism controversy" in Tibetan studies, but I hope it will suffice to mention just one example of this approach to interpreting Tibetan history.<sup>15</sup> I refer to the study of Dung-dkar Blo-bzang-'phrin-las, *The Merging of Religious and Secular in Tibet (Bod-kyi chos-srid zung-'brel skor bshad-pa)* first published in 1981.<sup>16</sup> Dung-dkar Blo-bzang-'phrin-las's work is a fascinating piece of indigenous historical scholarship influenced by non-Tibetan concepts of historiography, namely those grounded in a distinctively Marxist ideology. Despite its overt polemical stance, and the distortions of historical evidence such polemics generally require, the periodization of Tibetan history employed in this work is actually quite conventional by Tibetan standards, and for the most part follows an organizational structure similar to that found in Guru Bkra-shis's study. That is, we still see in Dung-dkar Blo-bzang-'phrin-las's division of Tibet's past an emphasis on the formation and eventual disintegration of familiar hegemonic power centers

<sup>13</sup> GKCB, p. 937 and 1055.

<sup>14</sup> For an account of the early development of Chinese Marxist historiography, see Arif Dirlik, *Revolution and History: Origins of Marxist Historiography in China, 1919-1937* (Berkeley, 1980).

<sup>15</sup> On the controversies surrounding the use of the term "feudalism" with reference to Tibetan history, see Stein, *Tibetan Civilization*, pp. 289-292; also, the various articles by Melvyn C. Goldstein, "Serfdom and Mobility: An Examination of the Institution of 'Human Lease' in Traditional Tibetan Society." *Journal of Asian Studies* 30.3 (1971): 521-534; "Reexamining Choice, Dependency and Command in the Tibetan Social System: 'Tax Appendages' and Other Landless Serfs." *Tibet Journal* 9.4 (1986): 79-112; "On the Nature of the Tibetan Peasantry: A Rejoinder." *Tibet Journal* 13.1 (1988): 61-65; and critical response by Beatrice D. Miller, "Last Rejoinder to Goldstein on Tibetan Social System." *Tibet Journal* 13.3 (1988): 64-66.

<sup>16</sup> Dung-dkar-blo-bzang-'phrin-las, *Bod-kyi chos-srid zung-'brel skor bshad-pa* (Beijing, 1981/1983), trans. Chen Guansheng, *The Merging of Religious and Secular Rule in Tibet* (Beijing, 1991). Mention should also be made of the recent Chinese publications by Rinchen Norri, *Teaching Material of Tibetan History* (Lanzhou, 1996) and Xinchang Losang Gyatso, *General Tibetan History* (Lanzhou, 1997). In both cases a decidedly Marxist vocabulary is employed for the various periods of Tibetan history, e.g., the "Founding of the Tubo Dynasty and Emergence of Feudal Serfdom," the "Separatist Regimes Period," and the period of "The Peaceful Liberation of Tibet."

culminating in the rise of the Dga'-ldan government and the political office of the Dalai Lamas.

Following this same scheme, but with less emphasis on Marxist polemics, is the contemporary history of Thub-bstan-phun-tshogs, *The Ruby Key: A General History of Tibet (Bod-kyi lo-rgyus spyi-don padma ra'a-ga'i lde-mig)*, published in 1996.<sup>17</sup> Thub-bstan-phun-tshogs's work is perhaps the most detailed historiographical study to appear in Tibet in recent years. He divides Tibetan history into nine overarching periods marked not only by key political transitions but also fundamental religious, intellectual, socioeconomic, and even scientific break-throughs. The work is a truly remarkable example of how Tibetan historiography has matured since the establishment of Tibetan academic studies in both China and Tibet. Here, again, we are reminded of the fact that historical classifications reflect the values and priorities of the classifier.

Now that I have a chance to have my own say about Tibetan historical periodization, I would like in conclusion to propose my own approach to organizing Tibetan history. First and foremost, I am not fully convinced that periodization categories contrived in Europe for the study of European history can provide a meaningful structure for the study of Tibetan history. Thus, I would prefer to abandon certain standard western historiographical conceptions of history, and particularly the identification of periods defined by an all-encompassing tripartite sequence divided into "ancient," "medieval," and "modern." The word "medieval" is particularly vague and ill-defined, as we see most recently, for example, in the ambitious three-volume anthology *The History of Tibet* edited by Alex McKay.<sup>18</sup> Here in volume two, Tibet's "medieval period" — subtitled "The Development of Buddhist Paramountcy" — spans an enormous range of over 1,000 years beginning in c. 850 and ending in 1895!

It is my opinion that scholars of Tibet who use this word "medieval" have given little thought to the implications of that term. To my knowledge, there has been no open discussion among Tibetanists, and thus little consensus, about the precise dating of the "medieval" period in Tibetan history or even what we should accept as the key defining characteristics of "medieval" Tibetan society. Rather, I hope that scholars of Tibet will be encouraged to conceive of the major periodic divisions of Tibetan history in indigenous terms, or at the very least make attempts to articulate divisions of time that would be consonant with how Tibetans might understand, or have understood, their own history.

So, to conclude. Although I do acknowledge that no periodization scheme achieves complete and satisfactory integration of the history of all Tibetan-speaking regions, including central Tibet (i.e. the current Tibetan Autonomous Region, TAR) and the eastern borderland areas in Khams and A-mdo, at present I recommend specifically a periodization of central Tibet into four epochs divided at c. 610 (birth of Srong-btsan-sgam-po), 910 (rebellion and fragmentation of the empire), 1249 (Sa-skyia Paṇḍita's appointment as viceroy of Tibet by the Mongol court), and 1705 (the beginning of various foreign occupations in Lhasa; see Appendix 1). My so-called "middle period," which I choose not to call "medieval" but rather "The Age of Monastic Hegemony" (1249-1705), is organized by parallel

<sup>17</sup> Thub-bstan-phun-tshogs, *Bod-kyi lo-rgyus spyi-don padma ra'a-ga'i lde-mig* (Beijing, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Alex McKay, ed., *The History of Tibet*. 3 volumes (London, 2003).

centers of power — a scheme largely inspired by my reading of Japanese historiography — that is, periods identified by the name of a territorial region and political center and by its affiliated sectarian religious leadership. Thus, for example, I suggest the Sa-skya Period associated with Sa-skya Hegemony (1249-1354), the Sne'u-gdong Period and the Phag-mo-gru-pa Hegemony (1354-1478), the Rin-spungs Period and Zhwa-dmar-pa Hegemony (1478-1565), the Gzhis-ka-rtse Period and Karma-pa Hegemony (1565-1642), and finally the Lhasa Period and the Dga'-ldan-pa Hegemony (1642-1705). This third period ends at roughly 1705 with the brief Qoshot Mongol rule over Lhasa under Lha-bzang Khan and marks the beginning of the fourth epoch, "The Age of Foreign Interests and Occupation" (1705-present) taking us to the present. In the end, having suggested all of this, it may be worthwhile to stress that any system of dating really should reflect the values and priorities of those who may actually be affected by it.



*Appendix 1: A Suggested Periodization Scheme for the History of Tibet*

IMPERIAL AGE

1. Early Imperial Period (c. pre-610)
2. Late Imperial Period/The Yar-lung Dynasty (c. 610-910)

AGE OF FRAGMENTATION

3. Local Hegemonic Period (c. 910-1056)
4. Period of the Emergence of Monastic Principalities (c. 1056-1249)

AGE OF MONASTIC HEGEMONY

5. Sa-skya Period and Sa-skya-pa Hegemony (c. 1249-1354)
6. Sne'u-gdong Period and Phag-mo-gru-pa Hegemony (c. 1354-1478)
7. Rin-spungs Period and Zhwa-dmar-pa Hegemony (c. 1478-1565)
8. Gzhis-ka-rtse Period and Karma-pa Hegemony (c. 1565-1642)
9. Lhasa Period and Dga'-ldan-pa Hegemony (c. 1642-1705)

AGE OF FOREIGN INTERESTS AND OCCUPATION

10. Period of Qoshot Mongol Rule (c. 1705-1717)
11. Period of Dzungar Mongol Occupation (c. 1717-1720)
12. Period of the Manchu Protectorate and Dge-lugs-pa Hegemony (c. 1720-1911)
13. Period of British Interest (c. 1888-1914)
14. Period of Tibetan Independence (c. 1914-1951)
15. Period of Chinese Communist Occupation (1951-present)



*Appendix 2: Selected Examples of Periodization Schemes in Tibetan Sources*

**(1) Old Tibetan Chronicles from Dunhuang (c. 8th-10th century)**

1. pre-Imperial/pre-Buddhist Period (ends c. 630)
2. Period of the Early Spread of the Teachings (*bstan-pa snga-dar*, c. 630-842)
3. Period of Chaos (time-frame uncertain, begins c. 842)



4. Period of the Later Spread of the Teachings (*bstan-pa phyi-dar*, late 10th century)

**(2) Rig-pa'i-ral-gri, Thub-pa'i bstan-pa rgyan-gyi me-tog (1261)**

1. Period of the Early Spread of the Teachings (*bstan-pa snga-dar*, ends early 10th century)
2. Period of the Interim Spread of the Teachings (*bstan-pa bar-dar*, mid-10<sup>th</sup> century)
3. Period of the Later Spread of the Teachings (*bstan-pa phyi-dar*, late 10th century)

**(3) Sa-skya Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan, Ne'u Paṇḍita, Bu-ston, etc. (c. late 12th-14th century)**

1. Period of the Early Spread of the Teachings (*bstan-pa snga-dar*, c. 600-842)  
\*The "Dark Age" (time-frame uncertain, begins c. 842)
2. Period of the Later Spread of the Teachings (*bstan-pa phyi-dar*) (late 10th century)

**(4) Guru Bkra-shis, Gu-bkra'i chos-'byung (1813)**

1. Period of the Early Kings (c. 600-798)  
\*(nameless interim period, c. 798-1268)
2. Sa-skya Period (1268-1349)
3. Period of Ta'i Si-tu Byang-chub-rgyal-mtshan and the Phag-mo-gru (1349-1435)
4. Rin-spungs Period (1435-1565)
5. Period of Karma-phun-tshogs-rnam-rgyal and the Karma-pa (1605-1642)
6. Period of Sde-srid Bsod-nams-rab-brtan and Gu-shri Bstan-'dzin-chos-rgyal and the Dga'-ldan Pho-brang (1642-1705)
7. Period of King Lha-bzang and the Qoshot Mongols (1705-1717)
8. Period of Dzungar Suppression (1717-1728)
9. Period of Mi-dbang Bsod-nams-stob-rgyal and Ching-wam Ta-las Ba-thur (1728-1757)
10. Period of the Regency of De-mo Rin-po-che (1757-1813)

**(5) Dung-dkar-blo-bzang-'phrin-las, Bod-kyi chos-srid zung-'brel skor bshad-pa (1981/83)**

PRE-ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TIBETAN POLITICO-RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION

1. Period of Bon/pre-Buddhist (ends c. 629)
2. Buddhist Imperial Period (c. 629-869)
3. Period of Chaos in Tibet and Interior China (c. 869-978)
4. Period of the Revival of Buddhism in Tibet (c. 978-1238)

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TIBETAN POLITICO-RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION

5. Period of Sa-skya Hegemony and War Between Sa-skya and 'Bri-gung Bka'-brgyud (c. 1238-1349)
6. Period of Phag-mo-gru Hegemony and the Rise of the Dge-lugs-pa (c. 1349-1432)

7. Period of Civil War Among the Phag-mo-gru Rulers (c. 1432-1448)
8. Period of Civil War Between the Rin-spungs-pa and the Dge-lugs-pa (c. 1448-1565)
9. Period of War Between Sde-srid Gtsang-pa and the Dge-lugs-pa (c. 1565-1642)
10. Period of War and Struggles Between the Ruling Class for Political Power (c. 1642-1721)
11. Period of the Decline of the Politico-Religious System and Internal Struggle Among the Ruling Class (c. 1721-1903)
12. Period of the Encroachment of Imperialists and Betrayal of Tibet By the Ruling Class (c. 1903-1949)
13. Period of Rebellion of the Ruling Class Against the Chinese People's Liberation Army (c. 1949-1951)

**(6) Thub-bstan-phun-tshogs, *Bod-kyi lo-rgyus spyi-don padma ra'a-ga'i lde-mig* (1996)**

1. Prehistoric Period (time-frame uncertain)
2. Period of Emerging Order (time-frame uncertain)
3. Period of Spu-rgyal/The Early Kings (time-frame uncertain, ends c. 629)
4. Period of the Buddhist Kings (c. 629-841)
5. Period of Fragmentation (c. 841-1247)
6. Period of Sa-skya Rule (c. 1247-1349)
7. Period of Phag-mo-gru Rule (c. 1349-1435)
8. Period of the Gtsang-pa Kings (c. 1435-1642)
9. Period of the Dga'-ldan Pho-brang (c. 1642-1951)



**Appendix 3: Selected Examples of Periodization Schemes in Tibetan Studies**

**(1) G. TUCCI, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (1949)**

1. Central Tibet from the Fall of the Dynasty to the Mongol Invasion (c. 650-1239)
2. The Sa-skya-pa [=Sa-skya Period] (c. 1247-1349)
3. Byang-chub-rgyal-mtshan's Successors and Struggle Between Phag-mo-gru and Their Ministers (c. 1349-1481)
4. Gtsang/"Reds" [Karma-pa] Against Dbus/"Yellows" [Dga'-ldan-pa] (c. 1481-1642)
5. The Triumph of the "Yellows" and the Loss of Independence (c. 1642-1727)

**(2) P. CARRASCO, *Land and Polity in Tibet* (1959)**

1. The Early Dynasty (c. pre-842)
2. Four Dark Centuries (c. 842-1247)
3. The Sa-skya and Phag-mo-gru Periods (c. 1247-1641)
4. The Rise of the Dge-lugs-pa (c. 1641-1728)
5. The Establishment of Chinese Dominion Over the Dalai Lamas (c. 1728-1911)

**(3) R. STEIN, *Tibetan Civilization* (1962)**

1. The Ancient Monarchy (c. 600-930)
2. The Evolution of Monastic Power (c. 930-1642)
3. The Modern Era (c. 1642-1962)

**(4) D. SNELGROVE AND H. RICHARDSON, *A Cultural History of Tibet* (1968)**

## THE EARLY KINGS

1. Manifestation of Tibetan Power and Introduction of Buddhism (c. 600-866)

## THE MIDDLE AGES

2. Foundations of Monastic Life (c. 978-1207)
3. Mongol Overlordship (c. 1207-1368)
4. Resumption of Independence (c. 1391-1578)

## THE YELLOW HATS

5. The Yellow Hats Rise to Power (c. 1578-1720)
6. Manchu Overlordship (c. 1720-1888)
7. British Interests (c. 1888-1911)
8. Renewal of Independence (c. 1911-1947)
9. Communist Domination (c. 1950-present)

**(5) V. BOGOSLOVSKIJ, *Essai sur l'histoire du peuple tibétain* (1972)**

1. La société tibétaine avant le VIIe siècle (c. pre-629)
2. Fin du processus d'unification au début du VIIe siècle (c. 629-649)
3. Le Tibet dans la deuxième moitié du VIIe siècle (c. 649-704)
4. Apogée de l'État tibétain au VIIIe siècle (c. 704-804)
5. Déclin de l'État tibétain dans la première moitié du IXe siècle (c. 804-842)

**(6) H. HOFFMAN, "Early and Medieval Tibet" (1990)**

## EARLY TIBET

1. Pre- and Early History (c. pre-570)
2. Rise of the Tibetan Empire (c. 570-649)
3. The Period of Regency (c. 649-755)
4. The Zenith of the Tibetan Empire (c. 755-797)
5. The Period of Decline and Disintegration of the Empire (c. 797-842)
6. The "Dark Period" (c. 850-1000)

## MEDIEVAL TIBET (not clear in Hoffman when "Medieval Period" begins)

7. The "Second Introduction of Buddhism" (c. 1042-1076)
8. Development of the Theocratic State (c. 1076-1300)
9. Decline of the Sa-skya Power and the Rule of the Phag-mo-gru-pa (c. 1300-1435)

**(7) G. SAMUEL, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (1993)**

1. Tibetan Empire (c. 625-841)
2. The Local Hegemonic Period (c. 841-1276)
3. Mongol Overlordship (13th-14th centuries / c. 1276-1358)
4. Dge-lugs-pa Synthesis and Shamanic Reaction (c. 1358-1642)
5. Dge-lugs-pa Power and the Ris-med Synthesis (c. 1642-1950)

**(8) G. DORJE, *Tibet Handbook with Bhutan* (1996)**

1. The Yar-lung Dynasty (c. pre-842)
2. Persecution of Buddhism and Disintegration of Empire (c. 842-978)
3. The Later Spread of Buddhism (c. 978-1235)
4. The Sa-skyapa Administration (c. 1235-1349)
5. The Phag-mo-gru-pa Administration (c. 1350-1435)
6. The Rin-spungs Administration (c. 1478-1565)
7. The Gtsang-pa Administration (c. 1565-1642)
8. The Sde-pa Gzhung [=Lhasa Government] (c. 1642-1951)
9. Chinese Administration (c. 1951-present)

**(9) M. GOLDSTEIN, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon* (1997)**

1. The Imperial Era (c. 630-842)  
\*(no mention of a period between 842 and 1207)
2. Tibet and the Mongols (c. 1207-1372)
3. The Rise of the Geluk Sect in Tibet (c. 1372-1888)
4. The British Enter the Picture (c. 1888-1904)
5. The Chinese Reaction (c. 1904-1911)
6. Interlude: De Facto Independence (c. 1911-1933)
7. Chinese Communist Rule: The Mao Era (c. 1949-1976)
8. The Post-Mao Era (c. 1976-1997 / present)

**(10) D. MARTIN (based on outline by M. Aris), [www.thdl.org](http://www.thdl.org) (2002)**

1. Early Empire (c. 600-842)
2. Tibet in Pieces (c. 842-1249)
3. Mongol Pressure (c. 1249-1349)
4. Rival Powers (c. 1350-1642)
5. Dga' Idan Pho brang Government (1642-1950s)
6. Manchu Pressure (c. 1720-1912)
7. Independence (1912-1950s)
8. PRC Rule (1950s-present)

**(11) A. McKAY *The History of Tibet* (2003)**

1. The Early Period: Yarlung Dynasty (up to c. 850)
2. The Medieval Period: Development of Buddhist Paramountcy (c. 850-1895)
3. The Modern Period: Encounter with Modernity (1895-1959)

