

Resolving place names in Amdo and Kham: A gazetteer for the Hengduan Mountains region of Southwest China

Susan L. Kelley

Arnold Arboretum and Harvard University Herbaria 22 Divinity Avenue Cambridge, MA 02138-2020, U.S.A. 22 Divinity Avenue Cambridge, MA 02138-2020, U.S.A

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摘要 Perhaps no region on earth presents such a confusing array of place names as does the area made up of the former provinces of Kham and Amdo in historic Tibet (Xizang). Within these areas, cities, towns, villages, mountains, lakes and other geographic features have at least two names applied to them, one Tibetan, the other Chinese. Overlaying this indigenous nomenclature are the names applied by outsiders, mostly Europeans, each of whom used their native language to transliterate the names they heard or read from Tibetan or Chinese script, and names in the languages of other ethnic minorities who live within the area. Adding to the confusion are the conflicting "standards" for transliterating Tibetan and Chinese names. To resolve the inconsistencies and uncertainties of place names in this region, a multilingual gazetteer and thesaurus was prepared. The gazetteer-thesaurus was compiled to be used as a tool for correlating the often radically different names assigned to a single place or feature and to provide the geographic coordinates for each. The impetus for this project was the need to assign geographic coordinates to plant specimens collected in the area since the latter part of the 19th century up until the advent and widespread use of Global Positioning System (GPS) receivers in the 1990s. Georeferencing specimens is necessary for plotting the historical distribution of species and for more completely understanding the information contained on specimen labels. Knowing the distribution of plants is important for answering phylogenetic questions, determining local and widespread biogeographical patterns, identifying areas of unusually high diversity or endemism, and determining areas in need of special protection. The value of such a gazetteer, however, extends well beyond the field of botany. It is intended to be of use to anyone with a desire to know the nomenclatural history of places in the area and for pinpointing with a fair degree of accuracy the location of each of those places.

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通讯作者:

Susan L. Kelley susan_kelley@harvard.edu

作者个人主页: Susan L. Kelley

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