

bsTan-'dzin Chos-rgyal's Bhutan Legal Code of 1729 in comparison with Sde-srid Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho's Guidelines for Government Officials

Christoph Cüppers

In his short introduction to the "Sources for the History of Bhutan" (Vienna 1986) Michael Aris remarked that the only published text which affords a parallel to the Bhutan Legal Code of 1729 composed by bsTan-'dzin Chos-rgyal seems to be "The Edict of the C'os rGyal of Gyantse" (Tucci 1949: 745–6). According to Petech this Bhutanese code of law contains the rules of conduct for the ruling class.

In recent years, however, the "Guidelines for Government Officials" written in the year 1681 by the regent (sde-srid) Sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho have become available. In it are described the duties of high government officials. When one compares this text with the Bhutan Legal Code of 1729, it becomes obvious that bsTan-'dzin Chos-rgyal to some extent used the "Guidelines" issued by the dGa'-ldan Pho-brang government as a model for his own code. Some sections have been copied literally, others have been shortened, and still others have been rephrased to fit the particular Bhutanese situation.

In my paper I try to explain the Bhutanese and Tibetan concept of governance in the 17th and 18th centuries, and to show the points on which the two governments agree, and those on which they differ, regarding the duties of their officials.