

## CHAPTER VI

### CHINESE WORKS ON THE HYDROGRAPHY OF SOUTH-WESTERN TIBET.

In the preceding chapters I have tried to show how hopeless a task it is to search in the ancient Indian, Greek, Roman, Arabian and other Mohammedan writers for any valuable and trustworthy information about Tibet. In later chapters we shall see how Europe got acquainted with this country only in very recent times. The only people which has since many centuries possessed really reliable and partly very detailed and correct information of Tibet is the Chinese. On account of their geographical position, their great ability for topographical survey, the admirable exactitude with which they are accustomed to describe what they see, and finally their political and commercial relations with Tibet, the Chinese have had through centuries innumerable opportunities to study Tibet from several points of view, administrative, commercial, historical and geographical. At an epoch when Tibet was still unknown to Europe, the Chinese had a rather clear conception of its geography, more especially of its eastern and southern portions, while central and northern Tibet has remained nearly unknown even to them. But being a practical people the Chinese did not care very much for those parts of the country, which were uninhabited and where nothing was to be gained.

ROCKHILL points to the fact that many Chinese scholars were sent by their Government to Tibet to hold official positions; they were thrown in daily contact with the educated and ruling classes and made records of what they saw and heard, which were afterwards published and contained a vast and trustworthy source of information.<sup>1</sup>

The most important Chinese works on Tibet date from the 18th and 19th centuries which is owing to the fact that the political supremacy of China in Tibet was accomplished in 1720.

As a basis for his Sketch quoted above Rockhill has taken the »*Topographical Description of Central Tibet*», or, as its Chinese title is, *Wei-tsang-t'u-chih*,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tibet. A Geographical, Ethnographical, and Historical Sketch, derived from Chinese Sources. By W. Woodville Rockhill. Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1891, p. 1 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> Wei is the province of which Lhasa is the capital; in Tsang the capital is Shigatse. Rockhill in his translation calls both provinces of which Lhasa is the capital »Central Tibet».