

has generally been done. Many peaks have been fixed long before the ranges to which they belonged were known.¹

There were, as Humboldt shows, many causes which were in favour of the Chinese, if compared with Greek, Roman, Semitic and Indian geographical works: the wars in the western lands, the journeys of the pilgrims, the religious interest for mountains in combination with the sacrifices, and, finally, the compass. Therefore the Chinese sources are much more reliable than any other classic geographical works.

In the latter half of the 18th century the hypothesis arose that one tremendous plateau filled up the interior of Central Asia. It was the plateau of Tartary. This theory is now worked out by Humboldt in the following words:

»Ein beträchtlich hohes Plateau erstreckt sich sehr wahrscheinlich ohne Unterbrechung, in der Richtung von SSW nach NNO, von der kleinen Bucharei bis zu den Ost-Khalkas und zur Kette des Khangkai . . . Fügt man zu dieser Ausdehnung der Gobi noch das hohe Plateau von Tibet, welches davon durch die grosse Bergkette des Kuen-lun oder Kulkun geschieden wird, so erhält man, nach meiner Berechnung, vom Nordabhange des Himalaya bis zum Khangkai der Chinesischen Mongolei, d. h. vom See Manasa und dem tibetanischen Kaylas bis zur NO-Grenze der Gobi eine transversale Erstreckung von 250 Meilen oder eine Hochfläche von 60,000—62,000 □ Meilen. — Wenn man die Kette des Kuen-lun nach Süden zu übersteigt, so gelangt man zu den grossen und berühmten Erhebung des Bodens, welche den Raum zwischen dem Kuen-lun und dem Himalaya ausfüllt.»

He observes that those intrepid travellers who have crossed the Himalayas all agree that they reached the plateau of Tartary and he mentions the names of Andrade, Moorcroft, Desideri, Grueber, Dorville and Herbert. But if we compare all the existing European itineraries with the Chinese descriptions of the same regions, we shall be convinced that the Tibetan plateau-land is by no means a monotonous plain, but is, especially in its eastern parts, crossed by many ranges and mountain groups in different directions.

Such a conception, of course, holds good for the present day as well as in 1844. And it should be noticed, although Humboldt does not directly say so, that all that was known from European sources regarding the Plateau of Tartary proved to be wrong if compared with the Chinese material. All the Europeans made the same mistake, only the Chinese understood the plastic form of the highland and described it as crossed by ranges and mountain groups in different directions. Their great mistake was in not yet noticing the great general parallelism prevailing amongst the different ranges.

Thus the Chinese descriptions must be made responsible for the transverse range east of Manasarovar which Humboldt, although he has not marked it on his map, defines in the following words:

»Ein grosser Transversal-Gebirgsrücken, etwas östlich von den heiligen Seen Manasa und Râwana-hrada, entspricht durch seine Verlängerung gegen Süden einem Meridian, welcher die

¹ A. v. Humboldt: Central-Asien. Berlin 1844, p. 13.