The history of the relations of tenth- and eleventh-century Tibet with Central Asia remains poorly documented in contemporary scholarship. In the case of Central Tibet we mainly rely on very scattered information derived from Tibetan religious sources—in written and pictorial form—which mostly post-date the period with which we are concerned. Chinese sources on Central Tibet from this era apparently do not even exist. However, the prospects for research are slightly better with regard to the Tibetan or Tibetanized areas at the periphery, such as the tribal confederation of Tsong kha to the north-east of Central Tibet. Concerning its history, for example, we possess a fair amount of Chinese documentation pertaining to the eleventh and twelfth centuries, supplemented by later sources.

In the case of the general history of eleventh-century Central Asia, there exist, apart from fragmentary Chinese literary sources, a variety of contemporary local materials. These include written and pictorial religious and non-religious documents on paper or silk, as well as coins, steles and stake inscriptions. However, these sources are not abundant and do not pertain evenly to all the different polities in Central Asia. Furthermore, they are difficult to study because of the great diversity of languages and cultures involved. With regard to the Silk Road states, most of the available sources originate from or concern the areas of Turfan/Gaochang, Dunhuang,敦煌/Sha-zhou 沙州 and, to a lesser extent, Khotan. These had all been important realms at certain times, and archaeological research in these areas has been more intensive than in other regions. By

* This chapter is based on a paper presented at the conference ‘Institutions religieuses, civiles et militaires du Tibet: Documents d’Asie Centrale, de Dunhuang et de Mustang’ at the Collège de France in Paris in May 2005. For technical reasons, only simplified Chinese characters have been used.
contrast, data on eleventh-century Kucha and post-1028 Ganzhou, for example, are extremely scarce. Rarely, if ever, do Central Asian sources refer to Tsong kha, so far as I know. Thus, even though it may be fragmentary and sometimes even misinformed or misleading, it seems worthwhile to study the Chinese material referring to our topic.

The reason why Chinese historiography took an interest in Tsong kha is related to its strategic value for the Song dynasty in the latter’s conflict with the Tangut Empire of Xixia. Thus, with regard to eleventh-century Tsong kha, the neighbours that figure most prominently are, of course, Song China and Xixia. Since these relations have already been studied in other publications, this chapter will focus on the little known examples of interactions between Tsong kha and the former Silk Road states such as Gaochang, Khotan, Kucha, Ganzhou and Liangzhou. Suzhou, Guazhou and Shazhou will also be mentioned. However, I would like to stress that since our knowledge of the history of these ethnically and culturally very diverse oasis states is still very limited, this chapter aspires to provide no more than a general overview.

INTRODUCTION TO TSONG KHA

Geographically, Tsong kha designates a region in northeast Amdo (in present-day northeast Qinghai and southwest Gansu) that is traversed by the Tsong (chu) River, including its valley and tributaries. In the eleventh-century historical context, however, it indicated the area under the control of the Tsong kha confederation that extended east/west roughly from present-day Lan jo (Ch.

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1 See, for example, ZHU 1988, DUNNELL 1994, IWASAKI 1974, 1975, 1986 and HORLEMANN 2004. The research is almost entirely based on Chinese sources. It seems, in fact, that very little information has been transmitted in either Tibetan or Tangut sources. I have been unable to confirm if Uighur or Khotanese sources exist on this topic.

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3 Short geographical descriptions of the Tsong kha region are also included in Brag dgon Dkon mchog Bstan pa Rab rgyas, Mdo smad chos ’byung; see the chapters Mtsho sngon dpon khag gi lo rgyus ’ga’ bshad pa, p. 27, Tsong chu ’i byang rgyud sogs bshad pa, passim, and Tsong chu ’i lho dang rma chu ’i byang rgyud bshad pa, passim.