

THE MANY WARS OF THE GANDEN PHODRANG (1642-1959)

Panel organisers:

Dr Ryosuke Kobayashi, Kyushu University, Japan

Dr Alice Travers, CNRS, CRCAO, France

Organised in the framework of the TibArmy project with the core team and invited participants, this panel studies the numerous wars fought by the Tibetan armies both in internal and international contexts during the Ganden Phodrang period. It seeks to document less-known armed conflicts and shed light on other better-known events through new sources, depicting how battles were then fought; it also analyses the role of wars, be they won or lost, as generating change on four levels: in the development of the Tibetan military institutions themselves; in the development of the Tibetan government; in the links between army and society; in international politics.

Chair: **Alice Travers** - Discussant: **Tashi Tsering Josayma**, Amnye Machen Institute, India

8:30

Panel Introduction

Ryosuke Kobayashi, Alice Travers

8:40

The Fifth Dalai Lama and the Conflict with Bhutan in 1668

Federica Venturi, CNRS, CRCAO, France

9:05

Tibetan Policies during the First Sino-Gurkha War (1788-1789)

Yuri Komatsubara, Meiji University, Japan

9:30

The Gurkha Wars and the Shift of the Qing Tibetan Policy during the Qianlong-Jiaqing Transition, 1780-1820

Dai Yingcong, William Paterson University, USA

9:55

Rewarding a Paid Sword – A 1904 Letter of Honour by the bka' shag for Soldiers Who Fought the British Invaders

Jeannine Bischoff, Bonn University, Germany

10:20

Coffee break

Chair: **Ryosuke Kobayashi** - Discussant: **Tashi Tsering Josayma**

10:50

Presentation of the TibArmy project: A Timeline of Wars during the Ganden Phodrang Period
Federica Venturi, CNRS, CRCAO, France

11:00

The Ganden Phodrang Army and the Sino-Tibetan Border Conflict in 1918
Ryosuke Kobayashi, Kyushu University, Japan

11:25

Borders' Defence at Wartime: the Role of Local Militia (yul dmag) and Border Guards (sa srung) in the Early 20th Century
Alice Travers, CNRS, CRCAO, France

11:50

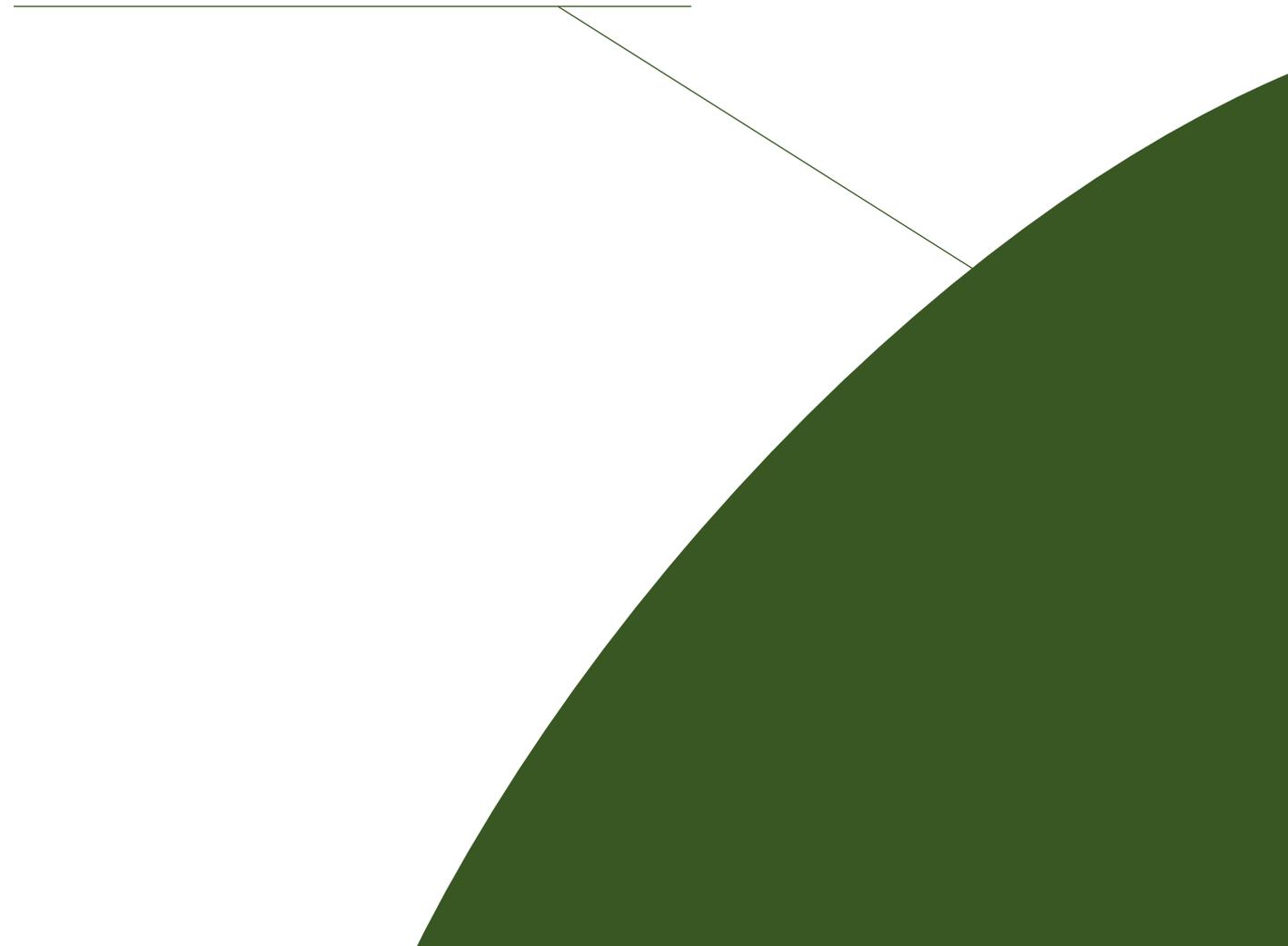
The Battle of Chamdo (October 1950)
Alex Raymond, University of Balamand, Liban / CESPRA, France

12:15

Discussion

12:40

END OF THE PANEL



The Many Wars of the Ganden Phodrang (1642 – 1959)

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Panel Abstracts

The Fifth Dalai Lama and the Conflict with Bhutan in 1668

Federica Venturi (CNRS, CRCAO, France)

In the 11th month of 1668 the dGa' ldan pho brang attempted a new invasion of Bhutan under the pretext of assisting the petty chief Mon pa A chog, whose attacks within the eastern confines of 'Brug pa territory had fanned tensions on the southern rim of the plateau. Like the previous confrontations between Lhasa and the 'Brug pa state during the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama (1642-1682), this conflict emphasized the difficulties encountered by the Tibetan and Mongol armies in engaging in combat in the warm and humid regions to the south of the plateau. Still, for this particular military encounter, the Fifth Dalai Lama went so far as to compose four different propitiatory texts aiming to achieve complete victory by confounding the enemy.¹ The proposed paper will briefly review the history of the conflicts between the dGa' ldan pho brang and Bhutan during the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama, and then proceed to examine the details of the alliance between Mon pa A chog and Lhasa. Finally, it will provide an overview of the above mentioned propitiatory texts by inserting them in the context of the issue of how Tibetan Buddhist hierarchs sanctioned war and violence.

¹ 1. Sa sprel lho 'brug pas tshur rgol byas par gdong len du dpung bcug skabs bsam yas su lha sa nub pa rin cen rdzong lta (= sta) byas te gnod sbyin chen por spyen gzigs dang bcas phyin bcol du gsol ba rnam par rgyal ba'i ru mtshon; 2. Sa sprel lho 'brug pas tshur rgol byas par gdong len gyi dpung bcug skabs lcang lo can pa bstan 'dzin dpal bzang rdzong sta byas te tshong 'dus su chos skyong bshan pa bya khri mig gcig par spyen gzigs dang bcas 'phrin bcol du gsol ba gzhan sde mi rtag lam du 'god pa'i mtshon rnon; 3. Sa sprel lho 'brug pas tshur rgol byas par gdong len du dpung bcug skabs chang mkhyen pa ngag dbang mkhyen brtse la mor rdzong sta bgyis te chos skyong tshangs pa dung gi thor tshugs can la spyen gzigs dang bcas 'phrin bcol du gsol ba blang dor bzhin ras gsal ba'i me long 4. Sa sprel lho 'brug pas tshur rgol bgyis par gdong len du dpung bcug skabs thang po cher lcang lo can pa bstan 'dzin dpal bzang rdzong sta byas te thang chen rgyal po chen por spyen gzigs dang bcas 'phrin bcol du gsol ba ha ha'i gad brgyangs.

Tibetan policies during the first Sino-Gurkha War 1788-1789

Yuri Komatsubara (Meiji University, Japan)

In 1788, the Gurkha kingdom of Nepal attacked Tibet and the first Sino-Gurkha war broke out. Although the Qing dynasty sent their army to help Tibet, negotiations for peace with the Gurkhas had already been initiated when the army arrived in central Tibet, which resulted in a peace treaty and brought an end to the war the following year. Previous studies treated the first Tibet-Gurkha war as a preliminary encounter to the second and paid it little attention, especially with regard to the Tibetan government's war policies. Nevertheless, it provided an opportunity for the Qing dynasty to change its political policies regarding Tibet; thus, more attention should be paid to the first Sino-Gurkha war and the Tibetan politics of these days. I have already pointed out that a peace treaty was signed by the Tibetans and Gurkhas to end the first Sino-Gurkha war without the Qing's initiative. In other words, Tibet brought about an end to the war by itself. How did the Tibetan government confront this situation and end the war? To elucidate this question, I focus on the Dalai Lama's uncle, Blo bzang phun tshogs, who was called A khu lags. Although he was a close supporter of the Dalai Lama on behalf of the regent at that time, there have been few studies concerning his political role in the first Sino-Tibet war. Therefore, by using Manchu and Chinese documents of the First Historical Archives of China and the biography of the Rdo ring family, I indicate how A khu lags played an important role in the war. During the war, the prime ministers of the Tibetan government consulted A khu lags and not the Dalai Lama for direction, which conveys his great power in Tibetan politics. Tibet was suffering not only from the Gurkhas' attacks, but also from the heavy burden of offering rations to the Qing army. Furthermore, A khu lags suffered from a serious illness. This eventually resulted in A khu lags deciding to reach an early agreement with the Gurkhas, which led to the end of the war.

The Gurkha Wars and the Shift of the Qing Tibetan Policy during the Qianlong-Jiaqing Transition, 1780-1820

Yingcong Dai (William Paterson University, USA)

At the end of the eighteenth century, the Gurkha dynasty of Nepal posed a threat to Tibet. Due to trade disputes between Nepal and Tibet, the Gurkhas invaded Tibet twice, in 1788 and 1791. In 1792, the Qing dynasty sent an expedition headed by its most prestigious general of the time, Fuk'anggan, to first expel the Gurkhas from Tibet and then invade Nepal. Contrary to the previous interpretation of this war that emphasizes the effectiveness of the Qing campaign, this paper argues that the way in which the Qing state conducted this campaign demonstrates that the Qing empire had reached its limits in expansion and frontier engagement. Deeply concerned with financial costs in safeguarding Tibet, the Qianlong emperor (r. 1735-1796) of the Qing dynasty envisaged an "exit strategy" by which the Qing was first to beat down the Gurkhas in order to deter future invasions—thus an invasion into Nepal

was decided for this purpose—and then to help the Tibetans to achieve self-reliance and strengthen their own military capacity, so that the Qing could free itself from expensive task of ensuring Tibet’s stability and security.

Although the Qing invasion successfully struck its neighbors in the Himalayan region, including the British in India, exhibiting that the Qing military was still effective, it failed to achieve the second goal of strengthening Tibet internally. During the decades after the second Gurkha war, the Qing dynasty paid much less attention to Tibet, which eventually made the Qing presence in Tibet a nominal one. This paper examines why and how the Qing dynasty, first under the Qianlong emperor and then under his son, the Jiaqing emperor (r. 1796-1820), quietly engineered and pursued a new *laissez-faire* strategy about Tibet during the Qianlong-Jiaqing transition. Among other things, the domestic crises at the turn of the nineteenth century, i.e., the Miao Rebellion, the White Lotus Rebellion, the pirate problem, and the depletion of the financial vitality, forced the Qing dynasty under the Jiaqing emperor to give only minimal attention to Tibet, and completed a shift in its policy toward Tibet. The paper will examine the thoughts of the two emperors with regard to Tibet, the changes in appointing Ambans, and the Qing state’s dwindling financial commitment to the Tibetan affairs during the period. The main sources of the paper are the Qing official documents, including both published materials and the archives.

Rewarding a Paid Sword - A 1904 Letter of Honour by the *bka' shag* for Soldiers Who Fought the British Invaders

Jeannine Bischoff (Bonn University, Germany)

Pre-1959 Tibet was based on a quasi-feudal social structure. To maintain its army, the centralized system of government relied on the levying of a military tax (*dmag khral*). This tax was levied in relation to the size of estates. It was thus less dependent on human factors of uncertainty and was the most important tool to ensure that the Tibetan army was properly and regularly supplied with soldiers.

However, conscription by tax, i.e. “involuntary recruitment,” meant forcing people to become soldiers in the army. We find similar recruitment strategies in Russia until the mid-19th century and in large parts of the Middle East until the end of the Ottoman Empire. However, in Tibet, the recruitment system was a mix of what Lucassen and Zürcher (1998) defined as “unfree recruitment” and “universal conscription.”

On the one hand, soldiers are legally obliged to serve in the army. On the other hand, consent to the terms was based on credible commitments by the government. These can be summed up in a two-fold compensation scheme: monetary and ideological recognition. As the soldiers could not work their fields during the time of their service, they received a salary to sustain their livelihood. Additionally, they needed to be convinced that their service was worthwhile and valued by their superiors.

In the proposed paper, I will focus on ideological compensation in pre-1959 Tibet. Military labour when based on conscription or unfree recruitment lies on the crossroads of free and unfree labour, as well as of wage and non-wage labour. Hence, it presents an immensely

interesting societal melting pot of factors of fiscal obligations and force, as well as social values, and the psychology of war. Document 982 of the Kundeling archives presents a perfect insight into the ideological recognition of involuntarily recruited Tibetan soldiers. The document is a draft letter by the bka' shag honouring the achievements of soldiers who fought the British invaders in 1904. Based on its translation, I will attempt to normatively reconstruct the mechanism of recognition within Tibet to keep involuntarily recruited soldiers' spirit up after a traumatic war experience. To support my analysis, and to show that compensation by recognition was a valuable currency during times of war, I will present similar cases from the Mamluks, the Russian Empire, and the Western World.

The Ganden Phodrang Army and the Sino-Tibetan Border Conflict in 1918

Ryosuke Kobayashi (Kyushu University, Japan)

The border dispute on the Sino-Tibetan frontier in 1918 was a pivotal event for the Ganden Phodrang government in which the Tibetan army won a victory against the Sichuan army, which had been a significant threat to the Ganden Phodrang government since the late Qing period. They recaptured the west bank of the Jinsha River, expelling the Chinese battalions which had occupied a position there since around the end of the Qing Dynasty. In the aftermath of the war, a cease-fire line was defined with the assistance of British intermediation, and it would go on to form a basis for the current administrative division of the Tibet Autonomous Region. Therefore, how the Ganden Phodrang government fought the war and negotiated with Britain and China are very important in understanding Sino-Tibetan relations in modern Tibetan history. Many scholars have examined Chinese and British involvement in the border dispute as well as their diplomatic negotiations based on the Chinese and English materials. However, how the Ganden Phodrang government engaged themselves in these affairs remains unclear mainly because of the limitation of Tibetan primary sources. In this paper, I would like to use letters from the Tibetan military commanders such as Kalon Lama Jampa Tendar to Eric Teichman who was a British official acting as an intermediary. These documents, which are housed in the National Archives in London, are remarkable materials written in Tibetan concerning the negotiations between Tibet, China, and Britain on the 1918 border dispute, and have not yet been examined by researchers. Through the analysis of these newly discovered materials, I will attempt to illuminate how the Ganden Phodrang Army conducted military campaigns, what role they played in demarcating the Sino-Tibetan border, and how they had been defending the fluctuating border before Tibet was incorporated into the People's Republic of China.

Borders' Defence at Wartime: the Role of Local Militia (yul dmag) and Border Guards (sa srung) in the Early 20th Century

Alice Travers (CNRS, CRCAO, France)

Since at least the 18th century—and probably earlier—when a body of regular troops was created, the Ganden Phodrang government defence system in times of war relied on the joint use of both these regular troops and the local militia (yul dmag) as well as frontier guards (sa srung). The local militia, which had been a key element of military organisation in pre-Ganden Phodrang periods, were never abandoned until the last war fought by the Tibetan government armies in 1950. Alice Travers' paper will show their crucial role in the defence system of the borders, as well as the way they interacted and the extent to which they were integrated within the regular troops organisation and hierarchical command. Based on Tibetan oral accounts and published biographies, as well as on British and Tibetan archives, this paper will take as case studies the defence systems of the border areas of Eastern and Northern Tibet and the way in which they took part in various armed conflicts in the early 20th century.

The Battle of Chamdo (October 1950)

Alex Raymond (University of Balamand, Liban / CESPRA, France)

The battle of Chamdo is the battle between the PLA and the Tibetan army between October 5 and 24, 1950, prelude to the occupation of Tibet by the new government of the PRC. This text seeks to take stock of this battle, largely unknown in the West, whose darkest aspects have been hidden by both the Chinese and Tibetan sides, while trying to compare, when possible, the information provided on both sides. Traditional historiography, found in most writings published in the West, has almost systematically presented this battle as a quick and easy campaign, with the result of a complete victory of the PLA and a reduced number of victims. However, recent Chinese documents demonstrate in fact that the progress of the PLA has been extremely difficult, mainly for climatic reasons and also in some parts due to the resistance of the Tibetan army. It seems that there have been many victims on both sides, as well as a lot of desertion in the PLA camp. The final (but in fact not complete) victory of the PLA was obtained in extremis, and the 18th Army's top staff and PRC leaders had real doubts about it until the end. Many years later, former officials of the 18th Army will recognize that if the Tibetan army had adopted a technique of "guerrilla", the victory would have been impossible...

One of the consequences of this battle will be the impossibility, in the short or medium term, for the PLA to progress further through Tibet, and therefore the obligation for the Chinese government to reach an agreement with the Tibetan government.



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Front page:

Soldaten der tibetischen Armee

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Back cover:

Chinese troops leaving Gyantse for China via India, 1912

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