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# Between Private and Public Initiatives? Private Schools in Pre-1951 Tibet

Alice Travers

The idea that there was no other type of education in pre-1951 Tibet than the religious education delivered in monasteries is common, as the idea that education in private schools—when their existence is acknowledged—was the preserve of a small social elite. This socio-historical study pursues three main goals: first, to highlight and document the existence of a rather important network of private schools in the first half of the 20th century in Lhasa and in other areas of the Ganden Phodrang territory; second, to describe this system of private schools and the education it provided; third, to illuminate the relationship with government schools and the questioning of the Tibetan concept of ‘private education,’ by analyzing the socio-professional profile of most teachers in these private schools and their mode of student recruitment. The paper is based on secondary literature, as well as on my own research through interviews in Tibet and India and the reading of autobiographical accounts published in these locations.

**Keywords:** Tibetan history, social history, Lhasa, education, schools, Tibetan society.

## Introduction

The existence of an important network of private schools in pre-1951 Tibetan territory under the Ganden Phodrang (Dga’ ldan pho brang) government has been so far overlooked and its significance vastly underestimated. In a 2011 study of Tibetan societies by a Han sociologist for example, several authors are quoted to this effect:

“[B]efore 1951, education was the monopoly of the monasteries that provided training for the elite to lead the country and for ecclesiastical careers. Secular education was non-existent” (Karan 1976: 71). [...] “In general there were no schools beside monasteries, no education beside religion, and no teachers besides monks” (Sun Ruoqiong 1990: 253 in Ma rong 2011: 281).<sup>1</sup>

There are a number of reasons for these conclusions: among them, a tendency to underline the ‘backwardness’ of pre-1959 Tibetan society in a certain type of studies, but also the fact that the majority of the research done on this topic has been published in Tibetan and Chinese.<sup>2</sup>

As a matter of fact, the history of Tibetan traditional education and schooling has long been of interest to the Tibetans themselves both in Tibet and in exile. An ensemble of detailed memoirs and research papers published since 1977 consist, on the one hand, of personal accounts of the traditional educational system by Tibetan witnesses,<sup>3</sup> and, on the other hand, of papers by scholars.<sup>4</sup> This body of work indicates not only that there were private schools outside the monastic system but also that the significance

of these private schools, from a social history point of view, is considerable. In a recent study (Travers 2013) I drew our attention to the existence in traditional Tibet of an intermediate social group, a kind of ‘middle class’ composed of government secretaries, aristocratic families and monastic treasurers, managers and secretaries, merchants, large land-holding farmers and military officers. I have also highlighted the role played by Tibetan private schools in educating—and perhaps even creating—this group, focusing on one particular aspect of the Nyarongshar (Nang rong shag) School social organization.

As an extension of my ongoing research in this area, the present paper seeks to document the general institution of private schools in Central Tibet from a sociocultural point of view. It pursues three main goals: first, to highlight the existence of an important network of private schools in pre-1951 Tibetan territory under the Ganden Phodrang government; second, to describe the system of private schools and the education it provided, based on existing secondary sources as noted above, as well as on my own research through interviews in Tibet and India; and finally to illuminate the relationship between the government and “private education” in pre-1959, by analyzing the socio-professional profile of teachers at these private schools and their mode of students’ recruitment.

The timeframe of this study is easier to define at its end than at its beginning: the majority of the available data concerns the first half of the 20th century and can be capped in 1952 with the foundation of the Lhasa Primary School under Chinese aegis, marking a new phase in the history of education in Tibet that is often presented as the starting point of “modern education” in Tibet (Qangngoiba 2005: 3).<sup>5</sup> However, in the present state of our knowledge, it is difficult to date the starting point of most of the private schools described here. Two papers by Tibetans (Chos ’phel rdo rje 1985: 30-31 and Suo Qiong 2011: 107-108) try to give some historical background to the private school system but they link them to the period of the Tibetan Empire (7th-9th centuries) without discussing more recent data.<sup>6</sup> They conclude that the beginning of traditional Tibetan education, that is, monastic education, dates to the spreading of Buddhism in the 7th century, with government and private schools beginning in the 8th century.<sup>7</sup>

### The Network of Private Schools: An Overview of Pre-1951 Tibet

As underlined by several authors, it would be false “to conclude that there was no education in Tibet before peaceful liberation” (Qangngoiba 2005: 1), nor to limit our understanding of traditional Tibetan education to the monastic

system (Khri zhabs zur pa Nor bu chos ’phel 2009: 49). To begin with, let us place private schooling in the context of the Tibetan educational system as a whole. All Tibetan studies on the topic present the traditional educational system as being made up of three kinds of distinct educational systems: monastic education (*dgon sde’i slob gnyer* or *dgon pa’i slob gso*), government education (*gzhung gnyer slob gso* or *gzhung btsugs slob grwa’i slob gso*), and private education (*sger gnyer slob gso* or *sger btsugs slob grwa’i slob gso*). Because private schools provided basic education, they were considered a key element of the whole system (Byang ngos pa 1993: 19). They were actually made of two distinct elements: private schools with children in various numbers (from five to a few hundred), and private tuition at home (either the teacher’s or the student’s home). The latter is not included in the present study but was very common and thus should be kept in mind if one wants to get a complete picture of the whole traditional education system.<sup>8</sup> A student would usually complete private schooling in three to five years (ibid: 21). A few would then continue their studies and receive private tuition with a tutor hired by the family and/or attend a government school/training.

Aside from political motivations, the significance of private education in traditional Tibet—and its impact on society—is currently overlooked because people only consider the Lhasa schools, and then only the biggest ones. But on closer study, we learn that an important number of small schools, organized by private individuals, existed throughout the Tibetan territory and that this education was not exclusively directed towards the children of a minority elite.

### Private Schools in Lhasa

The private schools set up in Lhasa were “located throughout the Lhasa area for the sake of convenience” (Rigzin Samdup 2006: 59). Drawing on data collected in various primary and secondary sources in Tibetan and English, and through interviews, I have compiled a list of twenty-five schools in Lhasa for the first half of the 20th century—although not all of them existed during the whole period. (See the list of Lhasa schools in the Appendix).<sup>9</sup> The exact date of the founding of these schools is rarely known. To give a time frame to this study, let us begin with the Kirä (Skyid ras) School founded in 1890, which is considered one of the oldest schools in Lhasa (Suo Qiong 2011: 109). However, most of the data collected for the present study concern the period starting from the 1920s.

Schools were generally named after the closest building or the building in which they were located, after the government charge held by the head teacher, after the family

who ran the school or after the village in which they were located (ibid: 111). To give one example, Pelgong (Spel gong) School had been started by a treasurer of the noble Pala (Pha lha) family, Pelgong Phurbu Wangyal (Spel gong Phur bu dbang rgyal). He was originally a *miser* (dependent farmer or serf, *mi ser*) from the Pelgong estate that belonged to Yapshi Taktser (Yab gzhis Stag 'tsher). Phurbu Wangyal became the senior treasurer of the Pala family and was given by them an estate named Pelnang (Spel snang), which he could hereditarily transmit to his own family. He lived with his family in a house in Lhasa, known, after his original name, as Pelgong, near the Pala house and where he started his private school.<sup>10</sup>

The schools were of two types, be it in Lhasa or in other towns and villages. First were schools run by individuals, often state officials or secretaries, near their office at their home, such as the Tsomönling Tsedrung (Tsho smon gling rtse drung) School, or in the compounds of public buildings meant for other purposes (in verandas, corridors, balconies, etc.).<sup>11</sup> In this category we find Tarkang (Tar khang), Karmashar (Karma shar), Nangnub (Nang nub), and Tatong (Rta gtong) schools.<sup>12</sup> Second, there were schools run by a lay aristocratic family or by a monk official household, which specialized in the sending of monk officials to the government (*shag tshang*). These were held in their house in town or on their estate (the teacher being a member of the noble family or somebody hired by them, either their own servant or an outside educated person). The children of their servants and *miser* would often enroll as well. In this category we find Pala in Lhasa<sup>13</sup> (and in Gyantse), Shölkang Epa Yondag (Zhol khang e pa yon bdag), Möndröl (Smon grol), Pelgong, and the two Yabshi (Yab gzhis) schools.

Four schools had more than a hundred students: Charpa Khangsar (Sbyar pa khang gsar), Nyarongshar, Pelgong and Tarkang. As for the reputation of the biggest schools, Tarkang School seems to have been considered the best in the 1930s (Qangngoiba 2005: 1, Byang ngos pa 1993: 20, who studied there, and Rigzin Samdup 2006: 59) with 80 to 150 students, then Tarpoling (Dar po gling) or Kirä School, which had between 70 and 80 students. At this time, primarily aristocrats' children attended these two schools (Byang ngos pa 1993: 21).<sup>14</sup> Later, in the 1950s, Nyarongshar, with figures as high as 200 to 300 students, became the most famous school for noble children, as confirmed by Rigzin Samdup's testimony on his school years in the late 1940s-1950s (Rigzin Samdup 2006: 59). Charpa Khangsar and Pelgong also show as among those schools with the highest numbers of students.

### Private Schools in Other Areas

Certainly, the education offered was not homogenous throughout the Tibetan territory. According to Charles Bell, who wrote in the 1920s, there was a contrast between government owned land where there were no schools (he gives the example of the Chumbi valley) and monastic and aristocratic owned land where there were schools run by monasteries and by aristocratic families (Bell (1928) 1992: 202). This must have been the reason why the 13th Dalai Lama is reported to have ordered the creation of government schools for basic education in all districts of Tibet, as we will see later. It seems also that there were far fewer—if any—schools in pastoral areas among the nomads.

Outside Lhasa, there were schools of smaller size in the biggest urban centers, as mentioned above, but also in



Figure 1. School at Lhasa, 1922, photograph by Charles Bell.

(PRM 1998.285.520, © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford)





Figure 2. School children at Yatung, 1926, by A.J. Hopkinson.

(BMH.A.92.1, © The Trustees of the British Museum)

smaller towns and villages. In the 1920s, according to Bell, young children (of all social classes) in the countryside were taught by an educated person from among the traders and the peasants, who would teach children, usually aged 6 to 14, on a part time basis, without asking for fees. These children could be later sent to a bigger school in towns with sometimes (not always) a full time teacher (Bell (1928) 1992: 202). According to another account, most of the districts (*rdzong*) had five or six private schools and for the others at least one or two (Khri zhabs zur pa Nor bu chos 'phel 2009: 49). This proves to be true for the few districts where private schools are precisely documented: in Nyemo district, there were indeed five private schools run by aristocratic families (Bya sgo, Rmar lam, Rdo dgon, Smon gro, Bkras gshongs), with 20 to 30 students each (Coll. 2000: 116-117). In Rinpung district, three private schools are mentioned (Spel ri, Bkra shis khang gсар, Srang smad) with 12 to 30 students each (Coll. 2006: 128). We have found mention of private schools in Gyantse—the famous Pala School (Photos 3, 4, 5)—as well as in Nangkartse (Bell (1928) 1992: 204), and on the noble Namseling (Rnam sras gling) estate, run by the family. Other schools are precisely documented for Shigatse, Medrogonkar, Chongye, and Chamdo districts (Suo Qiong 2011: 109, 116, 117).

Some private schools presented particularities in their recruitment: there were small private schools for the military in military camps, or a private school in a former police station, which had originally been intended for the children of police officers with around 12 students (ibid: 110). In Yatung (see Photo 2) in the Chumbi Valley, there was a “private school” started in 1912 by the Lepcha Chris-

tian wife of David Macdonald, the British Trade Agent, with around forty students at a time. According to Macdonald, the teacher’s pay was “met partly by [Macdonald’s] wife, partly by a grant from the bazaar funds, and partly by the mission in Kalimpong. No fees were charged, and the school was well attended by children from the Trade Mart and neighboring villages. The subjects taught were English and Hindi, reading, writing and simple arithmetic.”<sup>15</sup> The description of a similar other photograph in the *Tibet Album* (Pitt Rivers Museum) says, “The children were Nepalese and of Sikkimese Lepcha origin.”<sup>16</sup>

Finally, private schools also existed within monasteries, which were open to lay students, such as the well-known and long-established (since 1714) Mindroling (Smin grol gling) monastery private school. This had around 20 students, mainly aristocrats’, merchants’ and officials’ children, and also a few monks, who were trained for seven years in order to qualify for the Potala School (ibid).

Given this data, existing estimates in the literature of one hundred private schools with a few thousand students (Byang ngos pa 1993: 20)<sup>17</sup> might appear quite low, as we know that the number of students in Lhasa schools alone was at least between 1100 and 1500, if not more. In most accounts, only a few of the Lhasa schools are given, and it is probable that this estimation includes only the biggest schools, thus underestimating the role of smaller private schools in the same territory. Also, Suo Qiong writes that his incomplete list, which only documents Lhasa and 8 districts, reaches a total of 70 schools. Therefore, based on our own estimate for the Ganden Phodrang territory, including the 25

schools in Lhasa and a minimal assessment of one or two schools in each of the country's 150 districts, we reach a larger figure of at least a few hundred schools.<sup>18</sup>

### Private School Curricula

In these private schools, one learned what is considered in most accounts as basic knowledge: how to read and write, Tibetan grammar, spelling and mathematics, and in some schools, some more advanced or specialized knowledge. Calligraphy was stressed (ibid: 203; Rigzin Samdup 2006: 58)<sup>19</sup> implying that some students mastered the art of calligraphy to a high degree. Students would learn to read different types of writing and to write various cursive calligraphies by reading documents collected from archives (correspondence, petitions, edicts, public notices, contracts), at first spelling out all the words in the documents and then reading them directly. They would then learn how to write in cursive script, to have clear spelling and organized expression. Instructors relied on two major treatises, *The Greatest of Life-Trees* (*Ljon pa'i dbang po*)<sup>20</sup> and the manual entitled *A Mirror shedding light on grammatical difficulties* (*Rtags 'jug dka' gnad gsal ba'i me long*) (Byang ngos pa 1993: 22-23).<sup>21</sup> Other books that served as manuals for learning how to read are frequently mentioned in the sources, such as the Sakya Pandita's *Treasury of Elegant Sayings* (*Sa skya legs bshad*) (ibid), but also the *Treatise on how the King should rule* (*Rgyal po lugs kyi bstan bcos*),<sup>22</sup> and in some other schools like Nyarongshar the *Water and Tree Treatise* (*Chu shing bstan bcos*) (Suo Qiong 2011: 114).<sup>23</sup>

Students would also learn the basis of traditional Tibetan mathematics (*rde'u* or *rdel rtsis*, making calculations using stones/pebbles and sticks), the multiplication table (*dgu zla*)<sup>24</sup> and calculating rules (*cha phrad*), the different sizes of volume measures (*bre khyad*), differences in the weight of different scales (*nyag khyad*), converting smaller units to bigger units (*phul grangs*), converting different units, and also astrology (Byang ngos pa 1993: 22-23).

The descriptions of the various schools' time schedules vary little except for details. School started at 4:30 am with recitations/chanting of prayers (*zhal 'don*), and then went on with recitation of grammatical and spelling verses. Students ate breakfast at 8:30 am, and classes resumed at 9 until 12, with courses on handwriting. After the lunch break afternoon classes were held from 1 to 7 pm, focusing on handwriting, reading, spelling, recitation of grammar, multiplication tables, and calculating methods. School finished after the recitation of the evening prayers. During wintertime, school started at 4:45 am and finished at 6:30 pm, with some variation between institutions. For instance, in Tarkang, calculating was taught first in the morning before breakfast tea at 8, and in Nyarongshar calculation was taught during the lunch break. An inspection/examination by the teacher of the students' work was conducted before the lunch break and class ended in the evening around 6 pm (ibid: 23-24; Bkra shis rdo rje 1981; Suo Qiong 2011: 114).

Students had approximately twenty-five days holiday per year: five days in summertime and three days in

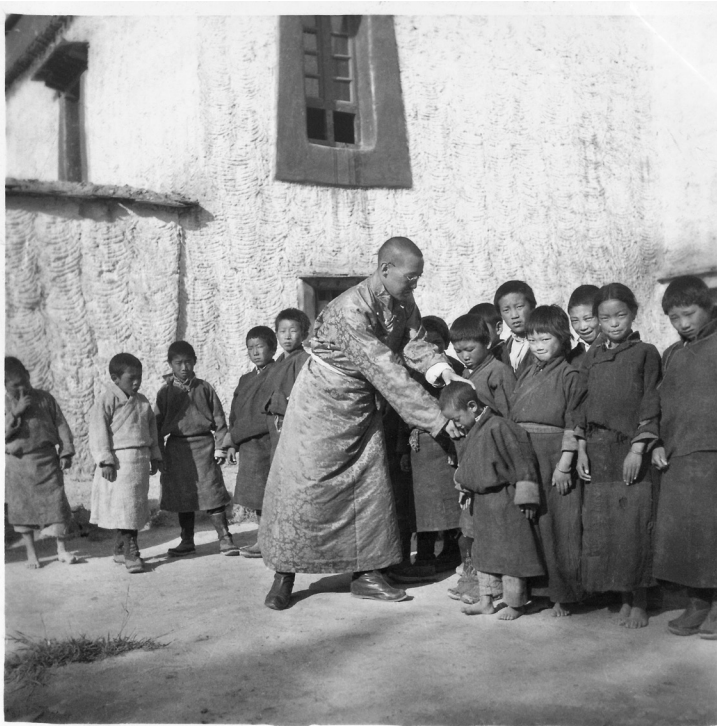


Figure 3. Pala School in Gyantse.

(P303213, © Tseten Tashi, Photographic Archive, LTWA)



wintertime, plus the 15th and 30th of each month, all the Buddhist holidays, including ten days for New Year, and government holidays. Moreover, there was one additional holiday after a new student had completed the ceremony marking his entry into the school. Before any holiday, a test was given to students (every 14th and 29th day of the month).<sup>25</sup> Students would practice sports, competing in various games like jumping, football, etc., and girls would play games like *tepe* (*thebs pad*), jumping, etc., but it was forbidden to play dice, carts and to drink alcohol (Byang ngos pa 1993: 20-22).<sup>26</sup>

The rigor of the discipline varied among the private schools,<sup>27</sup> but it was generally strict: boys were punished with a flick on the cheek with a piece of flat bamboo (*snyug lcag*), while girls were flicked on the palms: all students lined up according to their test results from best to worst. In Nyarongshar, the first and second had the right to hit the third, the fourth student received three strikes, and so forth. In other schools, the first three students were not corporally punished, and the same process started with the fourth being beaten (Bkra shis rdo rje 1981: 40). In others, like Tarkang, the first student whipped all the others starting with the second; the rest of the students had the right to whip those ranking lower than them. In every case, the last one hit an empty can or the school butter leather bag (*mar thum*) and was laughed at by the entire school (Qangngoiba 2005: 2 and Byang ngos pa 1993: 24). Punishment could also be enforced for various other reasons (if a student was late, made no effort or left without permission, etc.), and in those cases students could be ordered to stay during lunch break, be beaten on the jaw with the bamboo stick and rarely, whipped on his bottom with a leather horse whip (*rta lcag*) (ibid: 21; Dge rgyas pa 1998: 268-269).

### **Pedagogy: A Tibetan Version of the Monitorial System**

In most of the schools, the more advanced students took charge of other less advanced students according to a precise hierarchical organization, which was adapted to a study pattern very similar in all schools. At Nyarongshar School, which seems to have been the most strictly organized of these institutions and one of the biggest, under the teacher there were two class heads (*rgan bdag*) sometimes translated as “captains”, four teaching assistants (*rgan g.yog*), and four study monitors (*zhib 'go* or *zhib 'jug 'go ba*); sometimes more study monitors would be appointed, depending on the number of students enrolled at the time. The four study monitors at the Nyarongshar School held four ranks and were named according to the content and level of the different groups/stages of calligraphy study (*tshugs rim*), as follows, from the lowest to the highest level

(Rigzin Samdup 2006: 62-65; Khri zhabs zur pa Nor bu chos 'phel 2009: 58-59):

- the alphabet monitor (*ka zhib* or *ka kha'i zhib 'go*), under whose guidance new students would learn the alphabet, and how to write the subscript and superscript letters (*zlos gral*) as well as attaching the vowels, etc.;
- the elongated-form monitor (*tshugs ring zhib 'go*), under whose guidance they would learn elongated form (*tshugs ring*) and short form (*tshugs thung*);
- the form monitor (*tshugs zhib*), under whose guidance they would study the small script (*tshugs chung*);
- the general corrector (*spyi gral*), under whose guidance students would continue to study the elongated form and short form in addition to the cursive style (*'khyug yig*).

After having mastered these stages, students would be taught the four main styles of calligraphy (*qzhung ris*, *e ris*, *dbu chen* and *kham ri*), the first three being widely used in all administrative and religious official documents, and the last one being prevalent in eastern parts of Tibet (Bkra shis rdo rje 1981: 37).

One could find this division of tasks between teacher and captains in most of the schools (ibid). In other schools like Tarkang, there was only one captain under the teacher and a few assistants (called *rgan tshab* or *rgan g.yog*). Moreover, a number of older students supervised two or three new students each and taught them how to read and write (Byang ngos pa 1993: 20). Yulkagang (G.yul kha sngang) employed only one assistant teacher (Bell (1928) 1992: 105). The content of the schooling seems to have been very similar in all private schools, even if some of them offered additional topics, depending on the skills of the teacher, such as Medicine (*gso ba rig pa*) at Nyarongshar or English at Tarkang (Dge rgyas pa 1998: 271).

In all schools, students would start with writing on wooden boards (*byang shing*), where they would draw lines with chalk.<sup>28</sup> This was called the “dry writing” (*skam dras*; *skam bris*) stage. Only after they had mastered this first stage would they practice by writing directly with bamboo pens, made with a sharp knife, and ink on folded paper (*ltebs shog*) on their laps, cross-legged, without tables. The writing material would thus consist of a small box with a wooden tablet that students had to bring with them. In addition, they had a pouch made with wool and filled with white powder to dust the board (*rdeb rkyal*), a rectangular bag of chalk with string threaded through, which was used

for marking lines on the writing board (*thig rkyal*), some powder made of ash and whey to write on the board, paper and ink, a small pen (*snyug ril*) to write the alphabet and the elongated-form, and another bamboo pen (*si snyug*) to write in the short form and in cursive writings, along with a few models of calligraphy and alphabet primers, as well as a knife (Byang ngos pa 1993: 21).<sup>29</sup>

The reason for such a system of organization with captains, etc., might have been that teaching was a side activity for a number of head teachers as noted above. However, it seems that it was envisaged as a general pedagogical rule for the benefit of all students, and that it was also prevalent in one of the government schools that served as a model for some private schools, the Potala School. The first to have drawn a comparison of the Tibetan private schools with foreign existing models is Michael (1982: 140), who compared it to the “one-room schools in the United States.” And indeed, students worked in level-based groups in one space, and there was no custom of passing from one class to another one each year. Students would go to the next step as soon as they mastered the previous one, according to their own ability and skills (Bkra shis rdo rje 1981: 40).

The first comparison that actually strikes the observer is that with the monitorial system prevalent in India during the 18th-19th century, and perhaps in other countries. Based on the abler pupils being used as ‘helpers’ to the teacher by passing on the information they had learned to other students, the monitorial system is to be contrasted with the so-called simultaneous system, where a group at one level is taught by one teacher and is taught only by the teacher, and with the individual system, where one teacher teaches one student. The monitorial system became popular on a global scale during the early 19th century, when it was officially ‘rediscovered’ in Europe after it was imported from India in 1798.<sup>30</sup>

## Government Involvement in Tibetan Private Schools and the Engagement of Private Individuals for the Public

### Links with Government Schools: Basic Education before Specialization

As we have seen, private schools existed beside two other types of traditional education in Tibet.<sup>31</sup> All the government schools could be considered specialized schools intended for students having already acquired a basic education in either monastic or private schools.<sup>32</sup> As for government education, the Tibetan bibliography mentions up to six different institutions run and financed by the Tibetan government (ibid: 24; Horkhang 1993: 15):

- the Potala School for monk officials (Rtse slob grwa), founded in 1754;<sup>33</sup>
- the students of the Finance Office (*rtsis phrug pa*), founded in 1720: where lay officials studied before receiving their first official position;
- the Monastic Medical College of Chagpori (Lcags po ri sman pa'i grwa tshang);
- the Department of Medicine and Astrology (Sman rtsis khang), open around 1916-1917 where 100 students selected from the army, monasteries and districts studied (Narkyid 2010: 50) and where lay and female students could also study (in contrast with the Monastic Medical College of Chagpori);
- the students of the Ecclesiastic Office (*yig tshang slob phrug*), where students continued their training after having graduated from the Potala School;
- the schools for print block carving named Epa (*E pa zhes pa par brko ba'i slob grwa*) and Nyemo. The students of these schools (*E phrug pa*) were recruited as a kind of corvee tax by the government, to be trained in copying government documents.

Apart from this list, further government initiatives were advanced during this time.

It is important to recall the role played by the 13th Dalai Lama in the modernization of education. Efforts were made under his rule towards an opening to foreign methods of education, best exemplified by sending Tibetans to Japan for study (Jamyang Norbu 2008), and later four students to the United Kingdom in 1913.<sup>34</sup> The creation of an English school in Gyantse in 1923-1926,<sup>35</sup> an attempt that was renewed later with even less success in Lhasa in 1944, resulted from the same desire to modernize Tibetan education after a foreign model.<sup>36</sup> These two schools, though short-lived, should thus be added to the above list of government schools. The 13th Dalai Lama is also reported to have asked for Japanese primary and secondary school manuals in 1913 (Suo Qiong 2011: 208), and the Tibetan government financed the sending of some children to schools in India.<sup>37</sup>

Another development that needs further investigation is the founding of government schools outside Lhasa. We find in several secondary sources (ibid; Shakabpa 2010 vol. 2: 779; Narkyid 2010: 49; Suo Qiong 2011: 208; interviews) that the 13th Dalai Lama ordered the opening of government schools in all districts of Tibet around 1918-20.<sup>38</sup> A precise written source for this fact is never given in those accounts and Shakabpa's account makes it a little uncertain whether it was finally implemented or not.<sup>39</sup> But it seems that this

reform was actually implemented in at least some districts, since we have an account regarding a government school founded in the headquarters of Rinpung district in the 1940s, although it was apparently short-lived (Coll. 2006: 128). There is also reference to a government school in Medrogongkar (Suo Qiong 2011: 117). Testimony in Namseling Chökyi (Rnam sras gling Chos skyid)'s biography implies that this order by the Dalai Lama resulted in the founding of more private schools: she writes of having enrolled with her sisters in a private school of around 70 students, started by a family named Luding (Klu sdings) below Namling (Rnam gling) district headquarters, "after the Dalai Lama had ordered that each district and estate should have one school" (Rgya mtsho bkris thub bstan mkhas btsun, Rnam sras gling nyi ma g.yu sgron 2010: 13).

Finally, the Guomindang schools founded in 1934 by the Chinese mission in Lhasa (Qangngoiba 2005: 3; Khrang shis 'u'u 1985) and in Gyantse around 1939-1940, mostly for the children of mixed Chinese and Tibetan parentage (Fader 2004: 120),<sup>40</sup> represented a counter-initiative to the above-mentioned English schools.<sup>41</sup>

### **Socio-professional Profile of Teachers: Government Support for Private Initiative?**

Strictly speaking a private school is established, conducted, and primarily supported by a nongovernmental agency, a private organization, or private individuals rather than by the state. This definition applies to a number of schools described in the first sections of this paper, for instance run by private individuals like treasurers or secretaries of aristocratic families, medical doctors, or astrologists. However, I would like to underline how the term 'private' might need further discussion in this context, because of the identity of those responsible for these private initiatives. They were in the majority, members of government institutions: either proper officials (*gzhung zhabs*), lay (*drung 'khor*) or monk (*rtse drung*), or secretaries (*las drung*) of government offices (without official rank) or military officers. The profile of the teachers of the two biggest schools, Nyarongshar and Tarkang, has been particularly well described in the sources. According to one of his students, who also became a captain in the Nyarongshar School (Khri zhabs zur pa Nor bu chos 'phel 2009), Doctor Ringzin Lhundrup Paljor (Rig 'dzin lhun grub dpal 'byor; 1898-1979) was born in Nyemo, and went to Lhasa when he was eighteen to learn medicine with the Dalai Lama's doctor (Spyi khyab mkhan po bla sman pa). He started to give medical consultations when he was around twenty-nine. Later, students came to him to learn calligraphy, and so he started his first school, named after the place where he lived

(Kho bo khang ser). Later he became a secretary at the Lhasa City Court (Snang rtse shag) and moved to live at the east of the Barkhor, in a place named Nyarongshar, belonging to the Zurkang (Zur khang) aristocratic family. He then became known under various appellations: "Nyarongshar teacher," or the "office secretary," "Nyarongshar doctor," or the "office doctor." He taught mainly medicine and calligraphy but also arithmetic and grammar.

The teacher at Tarkang School was a monk official named Rong Pelün Tubtan Sampel (Rong Dpal lhun Thub bstan bsam 'phel). He had been trained in the Potala government school and had mastered all kinds of calligraphy. In 1915, he was sent to India to be trained in telegraphy; when he returned in 1920 he founded the Post and Telegraph Office. He started his school in the compound of this office, hence the name of the school (Dge rgyas pa 1998: 267). The general organization of the school and the curriculum, discipline, etc. were modeled after the government Potala School (ibid: 268). This Tarkang School is a perfect example of how the location and the organization of the school, as well as the teacher's background, all imply a sort of private-public hybrid institution.

To give other examples, Shölkang Epa Yondag (Zhol khang e pa Yon bdag) School was run by a treasurer of the Shölkang family and later by his monk official son. The Langdün Yabshi (Glang mdun yab gzhis) School was run by Khenchen Phuntsok Gyasto (Mkhan chen phun tshogs rgya mtsho), a teacher of the Potala School (Anonymous interview). Ganden Khangsar (Dga' ldan khang gsar) School had a monk official named Ngawang Thondup (Nga dbang don grub). Nangnub School was run by a monk official of the Agricultural office (So nam las khungs) (Khri zhabs zur pa Nor bu chos 'phel 2009), and the teacher at Charpa Khangsar School was a clerk also in the Agricultural office (Suo Qiong 2011: 109).<sup>42</sup> Apparently two schools were founded and run by secretaries of the Cabinet: the Peldetsang School (Dpal bde tshang slob grwa) initiated by Kunga Rinchen (Kun dga' rin chen) and located at the east of the Potala (Suo Qiong 2011: 109), and the Kashag Trunyig Labtra (Bka' zhag drung yig slob grwa), located between what are today the Banakshöl and Kirey hotels in contemporary Lhasa. A number of these institutions were connected to hereditary lineages of teachers, for instance in the case of Kirä School, where the founder from Gandenshar was replaced as teacher by his son-in-law, and then by his grandson, or in the case of Nyarongshar School (Byang ngos pa 1993: 21), where the daughter of the founder famously took charge of the school (Suo Qiong 2011: 109 and 111). Most of them were teaching as a side activity, in addition to their government service work. The monitorial system



made this possible. Such a reality implies a kind of consent to, at the least, or even support, on the part of the Tibetan government for these ostensibly ‘private’ institutions.

What religio-cultural values would lead such learned (and often busy) people, monk or lay, to voluntarily undertake the running of a school, without any financial gain? Michael interprets this “voluntary contribution to society” in terms of gain in social prestige and religious merit. “These schools were established by secular persons—such as physicians, businessmen, and secretaries in government offices—as a part of their contribution to society. Teaching added to their social standing and from their point of view, gave them added merit, but it did not affect their income in any substantial way as that continued to come from their professional work” (Michael 1982: 139). Suo Qiong reports the saying according to which: “to teach a child is to give him eyes”<sup>43</sup> and underlines the fact that running a private school was considered a form of charity and that from a religious point of view, to show compassion and determination in work was a kind of philosophy of life in the context of Tibetan society at this time.<sup>44</sup> In the same way, from the student’s point of view, the teacher was revered as the “source of all knowledge” and respect for one’s teacher is reported to have gone to the extent that students ate pieces of paper with the teacher’s own handwriting (when he had corrected the students’ exercises) (Rigzin Samdup 2006: 67). Here, the links that private education entertained with another system of

knowledge transmission, i.e. monastic education is visible: the relationship between master and student was a ‘traditional’ Tibetan one, largely modeled after the master/disciple relationship in a religious context.

### ***Socioeconomic Aspects of Private School Recruitment***

In this end of 19th and early 20th century Tibetan context, ‘private’ did not mean exclusive, since most of these private schools were open to girls and boys, and in particular to commoners’ children, with the exception of a few that were only open to particular groups, like the military (Suo qiong 2011: 111). The students were thus children of noble families, but also nephews and disciples of monk officials and monastic officials, children of merchants and secretaries in the lay and monk and treasuries government offices, as well as children of servants to noble families (Khri zhabs zur pa Nor bu chos ‘phel 2009: 52).<sup>45</sup> Some sources speak of an “elite oriented education” (Qangngoiba 2005), but when figures exist regarding the proportion of sons of the aristocrats compared to commoners, they show how numerous the latter were: to take the only example we have, at Yulkhagang School described by Bell and which a member of the Pala family attended in the 1920s, there were about thirty children of whom eight were sons of gentlemen and the remainder of the lower classes (Bell (1928) 1992: 105). These lower classes, as several observers have underlined, were made up of the urban middle class, and the upper social levels of the rural communities i.e. children of



**Figure 4. Children at the Pala School in Gyantse in 1927.**

(P303214, © Tseten Tashi, Photographic Archive, LTWA)

common farmers and herdsmen and servants' children.<sup>46</sup> The Gyantse School founded by Pala is described as having specifically enrolled sons of *miser* (Suo Qiong 2011: 6). The photographs actually confirm this assertion (see Photos 3 and 4).

We find concurring data in autobiographies: for instance, there is an account written by a man born in 1912, who was the second son of a government *miser* (*gzhung rgyugs*) family in Lhoka, Nedong (Sne gdong) district. When he reached the age of twelve in 1924, his parents enrolled him in the local private school run by the monk official Governor General of the South Province (*lho spyi mkhan chung*) named Lobsang Wangdü (Blo bzang dbang 'dus), where he studied for two years. He then went to Lhasa (Skal bzang tshe dbang 2003), where he became the servant of his uncle Parkang Dzasa (Par khang *rdza sa*), the Parkang referring to a monk officials' house. The situation seems to have been exactly the same in the territory under the Tashi Lhunpo administration in Shigatse. We can take the example of the education of Nordrang Ogyen (Nor brang O rgyan): born in 1933 to a family of farmers of middle status in a village near Shigatse, he was sent as disciple (*dge phrug*) to the Nordrang (Nor bu brang khang) house,<sup>47</sup> and became a monk in one of the Tashi Lhunpo colleges named Kyilkhang (Dkyil khang). He then enrolled in the private school run by the Nordrang house where he studied for ten years (Nor brang 2006: 795).

All accounts insist on the fact that no fixed fees were required by the school/teacher, although, as we will see, there were certain "expectations" (Rigzin Samdup 2006: 59), in the sense that the admission procedure implied a gift to the teacher and students according to the family's wealth (from symbolic to more substantial). Any student who wanted to enter a private school had to approach the teacher with a scarf and a small gift to support his request. When the admission was granted, an auspicious day was decided on which the student came and presented the teacher with dough of roasted barley flour, butter, and money wrapped in a bundle. Then the new student offered all students a "community tea," as well as sweet rice and money (Bkra shis rdo rje, 1981: 24). In Nyarongshar School the ritual for entering the school was the same. At the first lesson, the teacher would hand a cup of tea to the new student sitting in front of him and recite Tsongkhapa's praise to Manjusri while the student echoed him line by line. In some accounts, the students offered the teacher presents for each holiday throughout the year.<sup>48</sup> There was also a departure ceremony (*thon ja*) when a student graduated. In the case of Nyarongshar, it is reported that the students had to pay a "sum every month or two months to cover the cleaning expenses, and every five or six months for the renting of the building" (Suo Qiong 2011: 112), but in most other schools it seems that the students would take charge themselves of the cleaning in turn and that there was no fee for the rent.



Figure 5. Sports at the Pala School in Gyantse.

(P303215, © Tseten Tashi, Photographic Archive, LTWA)



Michael's remark that "the policy contributed a great deal to the absence of educational class distinctions in the nonreligious sector of society" (1988: 141) seems quite accurate. The children of different social groups were educated together, which certainly contributed to creating links between these groups and increased the potentiality for social mobility; but the educational model in itself, i.e. the monitorial system, with its meritocratic basis, implied a hierarchy within the school that could not follow social status, and thus contributed, though in a restricted measure of course, to the 'blurring' of the social hierarchy in a society that so valued education. There were indeed instances of captains from the commoner's strata teaching less advanced students of the aristocracy (Anonymous interview). Nonetheless, in some schools as Nyarongshar and as described elsewhere (Travers 2013), the social hierarchy found a precise expression in spatial organization.<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusion

In the absence of precise statistics but thanks to the data presented, we may state that private schooling seems to have been relatively widespread throughout the territory of the Ganden Phodrang, although certainly not spatially homogenous. Based on a great number of private and local initiatives, it offered a comparatively uniform education in calligraphy, grammar and mathematics, and at the same time a number of local variations regarding additional subjects and specializations linked to the profile of the teachers or the needs of the students. Because the first half of the 20th century was a period of change and modernization, a number of new features were introduced in some of these schools like the teaching of foreign languages and of sports, and there was also an increase in recruitment among commoners.

The Central Tibetan government provided indirect support to these private schools, at least through the significant involvement of its own personnel as founders and teachers of these schools. In any case, private schools were closely related to government schools (with many modeled on the most ancient government school, the Potala School, or sharing the same teachers, or because the teachers had been trained in those schools) in a loosely integrated educational system.

In addition, we might speak of a sense of collective responsibility entertained by public servants and socio-political elites in the context of a socially engaged Buddhism, or "Buddhism in the world,"<sup>50</sup> and in a pattern of strong continuity in values between the government and the civil society. The value framework of a "Buddhism in the world"

vision and its consequences on the social life has been, to our knowledge, seldom studied in Tibetan history. The links between the government and the socio-politico-cultural elites (lay/aristocratic and monk elites plus educated middle classes) was ensured by the fact that the latter took part in the government and thus shared a community of interests and values. We could thus envisage these private schools as "non-governmental public actions."<sup>51</sup>

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## Endnotes

1. See also Coll (2002). Interestingly enough, another party concurs with these views: the biographer of Tharchin who writes “education was therefore the monopoly of the ubiquitous monasteries” (Fader 2004: 73) was also quoting Karan 1976 on the subject. Ma rong adds after the last quotation that there were no schools beside monasteries: “except for the schools established by the Chinese government and mainly for Han students” (Ma rong 2011: 281). We will come back to this point in part 3 of this paper.
2. Except for brief but very interesting comments in Bell ((1928) 1992: 104-105 and 200-205); and in Michael (1982: 140-143).
3. In particular the studies published by the well-known specialist of Tibetan traditional education Byang ngos pa Rdo rje dngos grub/Qangngoiba (1993 and 2005), but also by other authors such as Hor khang (1993 and 1998), Dge rgyas pa (1998), Rdo dgon and Dga’ ba pa sangs (2004), [Glang mthong] Rigzin Samdup (2006), Spel gong (2007), Khri zhabs zur pa Nor bu chos ’phel (2009).
4. Tashi Dorje/Bkra shis rdo rje (1977 and 1981), Chos ’phel rdo rje (1985), and Suo Qiong [Bsod chung] (2011). I would like to express my thanks to Aurore Dumont who translated Suo Qiong’s paper for me from Chinese. I came across it at an advanced state of my own research, but I found it mostly convergent with my own results. His research is the result of years of detailed investigation, of publications in Chinese (although it ignores all the literature in English and by Tibetan exiles), and interviews with former students of these schools. Though too abundant to be fully presented here, I have tried to mention, integrate—and acknowledge—his main original data.
5. Soon after, in 1953, the second Primary School was founded in Shigatse (see the account by Chab spel Tshe brtan phun tshogs 1983).
6. For later periods, Suo Qiong also underlines common points and even what he interprets in terms of cultural influence between the education system in China under the Song and the private Tibetan schools, though as he himself recognizes, there is no proof for this in historical sources (2011: 108). But the common points he identifies, mainly the orientation of private schools towards popular classes and thus the transmission of elite culture amongst the latter, while failing to prove any influence between the two systems, does give a new understanding of the Tibetan private schools as less elitist than represented so far. We will discuss this again in the last part of the paper.
7. The antiquity of these particular systems and their evolution up to the 20th century need further research.
8. While the hiring of a private teacher at home seems to have been a privilege reserved for the elite aristocratic families, a number of students from lower classes had access to private tuition with very highly educated teachers, because of the conception of teaching as a compassionate activity, see part 3 of this paper. For a more comprehensive description of the education of the aristocracy, including the whole curriculum used at private schooling, private tuition and government schooling, see my unpublished PhD dissertation (Travers 2009: 279-284).
9. The list is certainly not exhaustive. I started with the list given in Khri zhabs zur pa Nor bu chos ’phel (2009: 49) and expanded it with interviews. I found two other schools in the list drawn by Suo Qiong (2011: 109), which also gives the precise location of the schools. A number of very small schools described by interviewees were not known to other witnesses, like the one called “Pato” (spelling unknown) and there were certainly others which are not documented here.
10. Spel gong (2007) and interview with Spel gong Blo bzang yon tan, Dharamsala (2012).

11. All photographs show students working in the open air, see for instance Photo 1.
12. Because the head teacher was the official responsible for the government's horses.
13. Existed around 1900, see Alexander (2013).
14. Tsarong Yangchen Dolkar, born 1927, who enrolled at Nyarongshar when she was seven, states in her autobiography that the four most important Lhasa schools were, at that time, Tarkang, Kirä, Nyarongshar and Pala (Tsha rong 2006: 81).
15. Macdonald ((1932) 2002: 224). Tarchin actually taught during a few months in 1921 in this Yatung School organised on the British-Indian model, and also opened at the same time his own "night-school for grown-up men" where he taught Tibetan. According to his biographer, he was participating in Christian activities in the context of this school (Fader 2004: 75), so that it can at least partly be described as a missionary school. This teaching experience at Yatung was a first step before, with the help of his benefactor D. Macdonald, he opened his own private missionary school along western lines, at Gyantse between 1921 and 1924. There he was headmaster with 33 students at its highest enrolment. Again, at the same time, he also taught English and Hindi privately to adult Tibetans, who were military officers happening to be at Gyantse for military training (ibid: 87-116). Tarchin closed his school when the British and Tibetan government decided to open their own school at Gyantse in 1923 (see part 3 of this paper) and Tarchin's plans for opening a school at Lhasa never materialized.
16. There were also missionary schools targeting Lepcha children in Darjeeling from 1841, but apparently without connections to this school in Yatung.
17. 2000 students according to Byang ngos pa, quoted in Suo Qiong (2011: 110).
18. For the list and number of districts in the Ganden Phodrang territory, see Travers (2009: 134-144).
19. In the same way, the level of calligraphic skill was given priority when exams were given to government staff (Rigzin Samdup 2006: 58). Fader has underlined how much this emphasis put on calligraphic skills was resented and criticized by some of the students (Pemba 1957: 127 and Dawa Norbu 1987: 121, quoted in Fader 2004: 74).
20. Abbreviated title of Dngul chu dbyangs can grub rdo rje's (1809-1887) grammar book *The Greatest of Life-Trees* (Thon mi'i legs bshad sum chu pa'i snying po ljon pa'i dbang po).
21. For the details of the grammar course see Byang ngos pa (1993: 25).
22. Ibid. This source mentions only the "Lugs kyi bstan bcos," of which there are various sorts, but we suppose that it refers to the famous Rgyal po lugs kyi bstan bcos by Mi pham Rnam rgyal rgya mtsho (1846-1912).
23. This Tibetan didactic poetry text, using similies of water and trees, has as full title: *Legs bar bshad pa Chu dang shing gi bstan bcos brda don dang bcas pa bzhugs so* (Elegant saying treaty of the water and tree associated with the meaning of signs and words) and was written by Gung thang dkon mchog bstan pa'i sgron me (1762-1823).
24. Up to nine in the traditional Tibetan form. On Tibetan traditional mathematics, see Dieter Schuh (1970).
25. The organization and the subjects taught seem to have been the same in rural areas, see for the schools in Nyemo district Coll. (2006: 129-130).
26. There are photographs of the Pala School at Gyantse showing students practicing various sports (e.g., Photo 5).
27. In one aristocratic family for instance, boys were sent to Tarkang and girls to Nyarongshar for this reason (Anonymous interview, 2004).
28. The four lines drawn on the wooden board had precise names (*'go thig*, *'og thig*, *dkyil thig*, and *rkang thig*), (Bkra shis rdo rje 1981: 37).
29. There is a beautiful picture entitled "School days, Lhasa" showing schoolchildren sitting outside with their wooden boxes and writing on wooden boards (Harrer 1992: 15). See also the drawings of the school material in Rigzin Samdup (2006: 57).
30. It spread in France, for instance, after 1815 under the names of the Lancaster method, Mutual tuition or Monitorial system. The latter designation proves more accurate, since the system does not imply reciprocity between the teacher and the students, but only among the students, between monitors and students. The system may be said to have been 'rediscovered' because it had existed in more ancient times in Europe. In France, for instance, there are examples of a monitorial system in the 16th century and even up to the Merovingian schools (cf. Zind 1976). On the spreading of the system from India to Europe, see Tschurenev (2008).
31. Monastic education, which is not included in our study here, was provided in many monasteries throughout Tibet, providing everything from basic knowledge to very advanced studies. As Michael underlines: "Monastic education, which produced the large majority of the more educated elite, was of much higher importance [than other types of education], both in numbers and in its impact on society" (1982: 143).

32. Although a few private schools also offered specialized training, like Nyarongshar in medical studies, training future doctors for the army, monasteries or aristocrat families, and also in other cases outside Lhasa. Suo Qiong mentions manual courses, like tapestry or knitting for instance, as being available in some private schools at Gyantse and elsewhere (2011: 119).

33. Hor khang (1993: 16); Blo bzang don grub (1988: 33); Bshad sgra et al. (1991: 33); but 1752 in Rnam rgyal sgröl dkar (1998: 259). A detailed description of its educational system is given in several sources like Hor khang (1993: 16-19), who studied there. The school is mentioned in all general descriptions of the educational system in traditional Tibet, but is also specifically studied, in addition to Horkhang, in Blo bzang don grub (1988), Rnam rgyal sgröl dkar (1998) and Bshad sgra et al. (1991).

34. See K. Dhondup (1984), who re-placed it in the context of the Great Game, the whole enterprise having been organized to strengthen British influence in Lhasa. A recent M.A. Dissertation, which I could unfortunately not read, has also been written on the subject by the great-granddaughter of Rin sgrang Rig 'dzin rdo rje, one of the four students sent to United-Kingdom by the 13th Dalai Lama (Langjie Zidan 2013). See also macdonald ((1932) 2002: 218-221); Tsering Shakya (1986); Harris and Tsering Shakya (eds) (2003: 99-100 and 116-119).

35. On this, see British Library, Oriental and India Office Collection, Annual Report on the British Trade Agency, Gyantse for the year ending the 31st March 1924 (L/P&S/10/218/P2418), and also Rank 2004. See also Macdonald (1932) (2002: 221-223).

36. The school opened in July 1944 but was closed several months later, as recounted also in British archives (IOR/L/P&S/12/4201; PRO/FO/371/41588 ex. F4200/38/10; IOR/L/P&S/12/4208/P5169). See also Ka shod and Lha klu 1983 (translated in English in K. Dhondup 1986: 155-162).

37. There were also private initiatives, where sons of the aristocracy and of the middle classes were sent to schools in India. Author Jamyang Norbu drew up “a (still incomplete) list of one hundred and sixty students who studied in about eight English medium schools in the greater Darjeeling district. The interesting thing is that although most of them were of the aristocracy, many were children of merchants and commoners. A famous professional gambler (a commoner) of Lhasa sent his adopted son to study at St Augustine’s School in Kalimpong. About thirty-six of the students on my list are girls. The cost of this education was a considerable financial burden on the families, but clearly they regarded it as important and worthwhile” (Jamyang Norbu 2008).

38. 1918 according to Suo Qiong (2011) and 1920 according to Jamyang Norbu (2008). In Shakabpa (2010), no precise

date is given, but it comes after the mention of 1916 for the famous comparison of the troops trained in different traditions, and also just after the mention of the creation of the Department of Medicine and Astrology, which is undated but known to be in 1917 (its building could have started as early as 1916 and the school itself might have opened a year later).

39. According to Derek Maher’s translation (Shakabpa 2010 vol. 2: 779): “[...] the Cabinet declared that new schools should be established in the various districts for the education of intelligent young people; orders were given that the regional leaders must implement the plan.” This first part presents the fact as firmly established. Shakabpa then writes about another measure (the idea that every litigant should be represented by a lawyer in court) before stating that “these measures” were finally withdrawn, making it unclear whether the government schools were also withdrawn or not.

40. In some sources it is called Kitöpa (Skyid stod pa) School, probably because it was located in the building formerly owned by this family.

41. A Gorkha (Gor kha) School was also established by the Nepalese government, but only after the period under scrutiny (after 1959). According to our informants, there were thus two schools named Gurkha labtra : one private school, before 1959, located near the Gor kha “embassy” (hence the school’s name) which is where sons of traders and aristocrats went and could learn Nepali in addition to the Tibetan language; and another one created after 1959 by the Nepali government.

42. This school was also known for having many *katsara* (i.e. mixed Tibetan-Nepali) students (interview with Nor bu chos ’phel, Dharamsala, 2012).

43. Quoting an unpublished manuscript by Luosangyangni entitled *Lao Lasa de sishu* [Private schools in ancient Lhasa], (June 2009) (Suo Qiong 2011: 111).

44. There is also the reported story of Nyarongshar founder, who started this school because he sought a way of overcoming the suffering of losing his sight and after he was advised to do so by Phabonka Rinpoche (Suo Qiong 2011: 118).

45. See also Tubten Khétsun’s testimony (himself from a family of farmers in which several men served as secretaries in the government) on Nyarongshar School where he enrolled and which he describes, concluding: “This type of school suited the needs of the society at that time, and drew its students from all social strata. [...] In the Chinese Communist propaganda distributed both internally and externally, it is forcefully stated that formerly only the Tibetan aristocracy had the opportunity of a formal education and that this was completely denied



to ordinary people. Some foreigners have been misled by this without checking the facts for themselves and the allegation has been repeated in some foreign publications [...].” (Tubten Khétsun 2008: 10).

46. On the particular question of the identification at the Nyarongshar School of an intermediate social class through a special list named “list of the ordinary people” (*dkyus gzhung*), see Travers (2013).

47. Also a monk officials’ house, but, in this case, each generation sent an official to serve the labrang (*bla brang*) i.e. the Panchen Lama administration.

48. As is the case in the description by Byang ngos pa (1993: 22), probably in Kirä and Tarkang School.

49. See Khri zhabs zur pa Nor bu chos ’phel (2009) and also Rigzin Samdup (2006: 61). At Nyarongshar School, students were enrolled in three different lists according to their social status: either landowners/aristocrats (*sger pa*), or “ordinary people” (*dkyus ma gras*), or “lower people” (*shod bag*). There were delimited spaces inside the school for the students of these three categories, although the schooling itself was the same. The children of the aristocracy studied on the top floor, whereas the “ordinary students” and the servants’ children each sat separately on one side of the ground floor (see Travers 2013 for more details).

50. This kind of Buddhist piety, according to which the path to enlightenment runs through compassionate action in the world and through social responsibility rather than only through ritual activity, had strong advocates in China during the same period, where it was theorized by Taixu, see Pittman (2001).

51. Luosang Yangni’s phrase, quoted by Suo Qiong (2011: 108).

52. In my own research (bibliography and interview), I have found no reference to three schools listed here (n° 2, 9, 14), that are mentioned in Suo Qiong (2009: 109). Twelve schools (schools n° 4, 6, 10, 12, 13, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25), found in secondary literature and through interviews, are not mentioned in Suo Qiong (2009). The remaining ten are common to both our research works.

53. Suo Qiong (2009) gives as name “Karma shag chen.”

54. Though sources give this spelling, I was told that it was the monk officials’ house of the Tibetan who was sent to the United Kingdom for studies and whose name is usually spelled Smon grong, and the Chinese rendering of Suo Qiong also corresponds to “Smon grong” (Suo Qiong 2009: 109).

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## Interviews

Interviews with Snar skyid Ngag dbang don grub (born 1929), Dharamsala 2005, 2011 and 2012, Spel gong Blo bzang yon tan (born 1943, son of the founder of Spel gong School), Dharamsala, 2012, and with Khri zhabs zur pa Nor bu chos 'phel (born 1939, Captain at Nyarongshar School), Dharamsala, 2012; and anonymous interviews in Lhasa, 2007, 2012 and 2014.

Table 1. Private schools in Lhasa.

N°	Names in transcription	Name in Wylie transliteration	Estimates of the number of students	Founder and date of founding when known
1	Charpa Khangsar labtra	Sbyar pa khang gsar slob grwa	100 to 200	
2	Drayaptsang labtra/Ragy-ab Tsankhang labtra <sup>52</sup>	Brag g.yab tshang bslob grwa/Rags rgyab btsan khang slob grwa		Jo lags blo yon
3	Ganden Khangsar labtra	Dga' ldan khang gsar slob grwa		
4	Gorka labtra	Gor ka'i slob grwa	100	
5	Karmashar labtra	Karma shar slob grwa <sup>53</sup>	50-60	
6	Kashag Trunyig labtra	Bka' zhag drung yig slob grwa	40-50	
7	Kyirä/Tarpoling labtra	Skyid ras/ Dar po gling slob grwa	80	Dga' ldan shar rgan, 1890
8	Möndröl/ Möndrong labtra	Smon grol/ Smon grong <sup>54</sup> slob grwa	50-60	
9	Mönkyiling labtra	Smon skyid gling slob grwa		
10	Nangnub labtra	Nang nub (Nang kar nub) slob grwa	50	
11	Nyarongshar labtra	Nang rong shag slob grwa (other names before: Gor khang sras slob grwa, Smon grong snub slob grwa, G.yu thog khang chung slob grwa)	200 to 300	Rig 'dzin lhun grub dpal 'byor
12	Pala labtra	Pha lha slob grwa		
13	Patho labtra	(?) slob grwa		
14	Peldetsang labtra	Dpal bde tshang slob grwa		Kun dga' rin chen
15	Pelpung labtra	Dpal spungs slob grwa		
16	Pelgong labtra	Spel gong slob grwa	170	Spel gong Phur bu dbang rgyal
17	Shölkang Epa Yondag labtra	Zhol khang e pa Yon bdag slob grwa	30	
18	Tarkang labtra/Gyakar labtra	Tar khang slob grwa/Rgya gar slob grwa	80 to 150	Dza sag Rong dpal lhun Thub bstan bsam 'phel
19	Tatong labtra	Rta gtong slob grwa	20 to 80	
20	Tsenkhang labtra	Btsan khang slob grwa	12	
21	Tashi Dondrup labtra	Bkra shis don grub slob grwa	15-20	
22	Tsomönling Tsedrung Gyantse Chöden labtra	Tsho smon gling rste drung Rgyal rtse Chos ldan slob grwa	80	
23	Yabshi labtra (Takser)	Yab gzhis slob grwa (Stag 'tsher)		
24	Yabshi labtra (Langdun)/ Banakshöl labtra	Yab gzhis slob grwa (Glang mdun)/ Sba nag zhol bslob grwa	30-40	Yab gzhis Glang mdun
25	Yulkagang labtra	G.yul kha sgang slob grwa	50	