



**HAL**  
open science

# Introduction: The Ganden Phodrang's Military Institutions and Culture between the 17th and the 20th Centu-ries, at a Crossroads of Influences

Alice Travers, Solomon George Fitzherbert

► **To cite this version:**

Alice Travers, Solomon George Fitzherbert. Introduction: The Ganden Phodrang's Military Institutions and Culture between the 17th and the 20th Centu-ries, at a Crossroads of Influences. *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, 2020, Asian Influences on Tibetan Military History between the 17th and 20th Centuries, 53, pp.7-28. hal-02511607

**HAL Id: hal-02511607**

**<https://hal.science/hal-02511607>**

Submitted on 20 Mar 2020

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.


L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# Introduction: The Ganden Phodrang's Military Institutions and Culture between the 17th and the 20th Centuries, at a Crossroads of Influences\*

Solomon George FitzHerbert and Alice Travers

(CNRS, CRCAO, Paris)

*Military Institutions and Culture in Light of "Connected Histories"*

ne often thinks of military history in general as a domain in which nationalist or nation-state historical approaches prevail, since military history often pertains (at least in recent centuries) to the history of a country's territorial integrity and national sovereignty, and military history is often taken as the yardstick by which such issues are measured and assessed. But military history is rarely as simple as the national narratives in which it is often couched might like to suggest. Like other cultural constructs, military institutions and military culture in any nation are shaped by encounters with external elements and contact with other military traditions and technologies. Tibetan military history between the 17th and 20th centuries clearly exemplifies this, reflecting an always unique, though ever-changing synthesis of influences and elements, in which older Tibetan traits, structural features, cultural orientations and nomenclatures, were mixed with those borrowed from foreign cultures.<sup>1</sup> Predominant among such foreign influences before the modern period were Mongol, Manchu, Chinese, Nepali, and somewhat later Japanese, Russian, Indian and British. It is therefore as relevant in this field of historical study as in any other, to take account of "global history" and "connected histories". This latter term is particularly associated with the

---

\* Research for this article was funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement 677952 "TibArmy"). The content reflects only the authors' views and the ERC is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

<sup>1</sup> Such syntheses have been observed in many other areas of Tibetan cultural history such as art, astrology, medicine, and even religion. Pre-communist Tibetan forms of civil administration also bore the imprint of a long historical evolution and the importation of many norms and nomenclatures from outside the Tibetan cultural region.

work of Sanjay Subrahmanyam, whose writings on South Asian history have helped re-frame narratives often simplistically presented in “colonial” terms,<sup>2</sup> to look at phenomena beyond the local and particular, and beyond issues of power and hegemony, to see wider historical trajectories in light of many complicating and influencing factors.

In terms of military history, these include structural and contingent situations of contact with external or extraneous military forces and traditions, whether under conditions of conflict (war being the most obvious example),<sup>3</sup> or of alliance, cooperation, supremacy or subordination.

Our premise in framing the broad theme of this volume was that although the Ganden Phodrang (Dga' ldan pho brang)'s military institutions were heir to a strong Tibetan martial tradition with roots extending back as far as the period of the Tibetan Empire (7th to 9th centuries) and perhaps beyond—a tradition whose traces were still visible in the Ganden Phodrang's army until 1959 and whose importance we do not want to underestimate—, it is also abundantly clear that our understanding of the formation and evolution of the Tibetan army and its traditions from the 17th to 20th centuries would be woefully inadequate if it were analysed solely in the Tibetan context.

As such, this volume is an attempt to place the study of the Ganden Phodrang's military institutions and “military culture” more generally, within the broader context merited by the dynamics of Tibetan history during this period.

There are different definitions of “military culture” so it is worth reprising here four such distinct meanings of the term as presented by Nicola di Cosmo in his work on Imperial China:

First, military culture refers to a discrete, bounded system of conduct and behaviour to which members of the military are supposed to adhere, made of written and unwritten rules and conventions as well as distinctive beliefs and symbols. Second, military culture can mean strategic culture (in Chinese, *zhanlüe wenhua*), which involves a decision-

---

<sup>2</sup> Subrahmanyam's transnational paradigm of “connected histories” has been expressed in his studies of early modern South Asia and its relationships with Europe (see for example Subrahmanyam 1997).

<sup>3</sup> The conflicts or wars fought in Tibet during this period are not the main focus of this volume, but insofar as they represent moments of contact and influence they are of course very significant, as reflected in the contributions by Hosung Shim and Ulrich Theobald. The specific topic of wars fought during the Ganden Phodrang period is a subject addressed in a separate publication of the TibArmy project, based on a panel convened on this theme as part of the 2019 International Association for Tibetan Studies held in Paris. The proceedings of that panel are currently being edited as a separate volume.

making process that transcends the specific behaviour of military people and involves instead the accumulated and transmitted knowledge upon which those involved in making strategic choices, from both the civil and military side, base their arguments, validate their positions, and examine a given situation. Third, military culture can be understood as the set of values that determine a society's inclination for war and military organization. [...] Fourth, military culture may refer to the presence of an aesthetic and literary tradition that values military events and raises the status of those who accomplish martial exploits to the level of heroes and demigods in epic cycles and poetry, visual representations, communal celebrations, and state rituals.<sup>4</sup>

The first two meanings target the culture of the military, while the latter two address the relationship between the military and society. While some of the articles in this volume focus on the former—reforms to military institutions, personnel and organisational issues, as well as evolutions in strategic orientations and technologies—, other articles hope to shed light on features of military culture as they were projected into social, cultural, political or religious spheres. For example, the Tibetan literary and ritual traditions related to the Chinese martial deity Guandi—which emerged in the wake of Qing's military involvement in Tibet—and this figure's cultural association with the Tibeto-Mongol figure of Gesar, illustrate both the impact of the military on cultural life, and also the highly connected military cultures of Inner Asia during this period.

*The Ganden Phodrang's Military History  
between the 17th and the 20th Centuries*

In one perspective, the establishment of the Ganden Phodrang as the government of a reunified Tibet in 1642 represented the re-assertion and concrete realisation of a long-aspired-to Tibet-centric political order that had been nurtured in Tibetan literature, myth and historiography for centuries. Namely, the reunification of Tibet under the enlightened rule of an emanation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, in the form of the successive incarnations of the Dalai Lama. However the year 1642 also, in another perspective, marked the beginning of a period of even greater political and cultural *connectedness* between Ti-

---

<sup>4</sup> Di Cosmo 2009: 3–4. The term “military culture” is also sometimes understood in an even broader way, encompassing for instance military institutions and administration, as for example in Wilson 2008, which is the definition referred to in Ulrich Theobald's article.

bet and its neighbours, and in particular of increased military dependence on its northern (and later) eastern neighbours. Indeed, as a Buddhist government, the Ganden Phodrang's choice to relinquish—albeit to a highly variable degree depending on the period—part of the military defence of its territory to foreign troops, first Mongol and later Sino-Manchu, in the framework of “patron-preceptor” (*mchod yon*) relationships, created a structural situation involving long-term contacts and cooperation between Tibetans and “foreign” military cultures.<sup>5</sup> As such, the Ganden Phodrang's military institutions as well as its military culture were in large part shaped over these centuries by fluctuating and changing relations with various neighbours and allies, and

---

<sup>5</sup> The use of the terms “foreign” and “foreign culture” in the period under discussion raises particular methodological difficulties. The politically-ascendant Geluk—and more generally Buddhist—establishment, that served as the basis for the Tibetan Ganden Phodrang government, was one founded upon a religious identity which transcended ethnicity. So although Tibetan sources of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries do often present ethnic markers and distinctions in relatively simple terms, it is also clear that questions of identity in this period were complex, and ethnic markers and nomenclatures could, and did, shift. Ethnic Mongols for example had been settling on the Tibetan plateau since the late 13th century, so those referred to as “Hor” in Tibetan sources of the mid-17th century might refer to individuals and communities with varied degrees of Tibetan indigenisation. Similarly, the Manchu elite which rose to dominance in the 17th century in China and came to play a dominant role in Tibet from the early-mid-18th century, were an elite which had extensively intermarried with Mongol families, making notions of distinct ethnic or national identities problematic. Many of the key political and diplomatic figures in Tibet's relations with the Qing Dynasty were, as is well known, what Perdue has called “transfrontiersmen”—individuals such as Changkya Rölpe Dorjé (Lcang skya Rol pa'i rdo rje, 1717–1786) or Sumpa Khenpo Yeshe Penjor (Sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor, 1704–1788), whose own identities traversed a conjunction of linguistic and cultural areas and defied simple identifications as either “Tibetan” or “Mongol”. At the same time however, the Qing Imperium was deliberate in its preservation of ethnicity as a marker of status in codes of dress and so on. This peculiar and sometime paradoxical blend of syncretism on the one hand, and the preservation of distinction in the domain of identity on the other, was indeed one of the hallmarks of the Qing's complex “transnational” but at the same time ethnically-based politics, which in recent decades has been explored by several scholars in the wave of so-called New Qing History. An appreciation of these nuanced complexities and how they shifted over time is crucial for an understanding of the crucial role that Tibetan Buddhism played within the Qing imperial culture, providing as it did, a whole arena of markers of fidelity and solidarity which transcended nation and language. Notwithstanding such complications in the use of the terms “Tibetan” and “foreign”, we still feel that a Tibet-centric approach to this period of Tibetan military history remains both relevant and important, since the Tibetan Ganden Phodrang government, even prior to its period of *de facto* independence (1913–1950), maintained between 1642 and 1911 a high degree of cultural and political autonomy, despite its varied degrees of incorporation into extraneous imperial projects.

thus cannot be fully understood without reference to alternative centres, cultures and agendas.

The aim of this volume is not to reprise the general history of this period, but rather to focus on particular aspects of Tibet's changing military history—in both institutional and cultural terms—which were impacted by situations of contact with other Asian military traditions.<sup>6</sup> As is well-known, the military power which brought the Ganden Phodrang to power as the government of Tibet in 1642, was an alliance of Tibetans and Mongols.<sup>7</sup> Militarily-speaking, the Qoshot (also Kho-shuud) Mongol forces of Gushri Khan played the dominant role in these campaigns, while a supporting role was played by Tibetan troops and the monks of the major Geluk monasteries of Lhasa.<sup>8</sup> With the establishment of this new Geluk government under the titular leadership of the Fifth Dalai Lama,<sup>9</sup> it was entirely natural that Mongol forces, under the command of Gushri Khan himself, would continue to play a dominant role in Tibetan military affairs.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, it is also clear, though still somewhat obscured from the historian's eye by the paucity of available documentary evidence and the difficulties of access to those documents that may actually exist, that Tibetan military forces and Tibetan militias, serving under Tibetan military command-

---

<sup>6</sup> The most comprehensive study to date on the military history of Tibet itself is the Tibetan-language work by the former military officer Gyantse Namgyel Wangdü (Dwang slob mda' zur spyi 'thus rgyal rtse nam rgyal dbang 'dus 2003), later translated into English (Gyaltse Namgyal Wangdue 2010 and 2012). For a brief discussion of the status of this source, see Travers and Venturi 2019: 20.

<sup>7</sup> The influence of Mongols in Tibet, in terms of military organisation and traditions, of course predates the Ganden Phodrang period. Tibet had been militarily dominated by Mongols for a century in the mid 13th-mid 14th century during the Sakya-Mongol period (see *inter alia* Petech 1990). However, with the fall of the Yuan, the Mongol presence appears to have decreased, whether through departure or indigenisation or a mixture of the two. During the Ming dynasty there appears to have been no significant Imperial troop presence in Tibet, and the period also saw a burgeoning nationalist discourse of "Mongol-repelling" in Tibetan literature (Gentry 2016).

<sup>8</sup> As attested to in the autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama; Karmay 2014: 156–157.

<sup>9</sup> The practical day-to-day control of the Fifth Dalai Lama himself over his government increased after the deaths, both in the 1650s, of his manager, *zhalngo* Sönam Raptan (*zhal ngo* Bsod nams rab brtan), and his military patron Gushri Khan.

<sup>10</sup> The Tibetan government acknowledged and commemorated the key role played by Gushri Khan in bringing it to power in the 17th century, through the institutionalisation of annual state ceremonies, which continued into the 20th century, in which people would don the full centuries-old military attire of Gushri Khan's troops during the festivities of the Mönlam Chenmo (Smon lam chen mo). For descriptions of the Mongol-style costumes worn by the two *Ya sor* commanders leading the two wings (*ru*) and their Mongol troops, see Richardson: 1993: 31–37 and Karsten 1983. See also photographs 9 and 10 in the appendix of this introduction.

ers, also continued to be a key feature of the military-political landscape, and played a significant role in the various conflicts and campaigns (such as those in Ladakh and Bhutan) fought on behalf of the early Ganden Phodrang.

With the rise of the Manchu dynasty in China, and towards the later decades of the reign of the Fifth Dalai Lama, the balance of influence in Tibet increasingly shifted from the Qoshot Mongol royalty towards the Manchu emperor, who came to be regarded as a significant source of authority for the Fifth Dalai Lama himself, as indicated by chancellery Tibetan archive documents from the 1670s.<sup>11</sup> The Manchus had since the beginning of their rule taken a keen interest in Tibetan affairs, and that of the Geluk establishment in particular. As Peter Schwieger puts it, “even at this early stage of their imperial history, the Manchus tried to form their Inner Asian face by promoting Tibetan Buddhism—alongside Chinese Buddhism and other religious beliefs”,<sup>12</sup> and the Ganden Phodrang’s distinctive model of government, known in Tibetan as the “two systems” (*lugs gnyis*), which was rendered into Mongolian and Manchu as “religious government” (Mo. *törü šasin*, Ma. *doro shajin*),<sup>13</sup> came to be regarded as “an accepted basis for the Inner Asian diplomatic relations among the Mongols, Tibetans, and Manchus”.<sup>14</sup>

The military landscape of Inner Asia in the late 17th century was dominated by the conflict between the Manchu Qing Dynasty under Emperor Kangxi (r. 1661–1722) and the Zunghar Khanate led by Galdan Tenzin Boshugtu Khan (Tib. Dga’ ldan bstan ’dzin, 1644–1697), who had himself been educated in Tibet as a prestigious Geluk *triilku* (Tib. *sprul sku*) incarnation at Tashilhunpo monastery.<sup>15</sup> The significance of Tibet for the early Qing was therefore largely—though not entirely—based on considerations of the Tibetan (and especially Geluk) influence over the various Mongol tribes and the Zunghars in particular. The history of the protracted Qing-Zunghar war, including the

---

<sup>11</sup> See Schwieger 2015: 63–64. The fact that the Fifth Dalai Lama used the authority of the Manchu emperor to augment his own status does not mean that he considered the Emperor could interfere directly in Tibetan affairs (*ibid.*: 64).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*: 34.

<sup>13</sup> See Ishimhama 2004: 19–24.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*: 35.

<sup>15</sup> A grandson of Gushri Khan, he had been identified as the Fourth Ensa *triilku* (Dben sa sprul sku) and educated by the Panchen and Dalai Lama as his personal teachers; see Schwieger 2015: 73. This figure is not to be confused with Galden Tsewang Pelzang (Dga ldan tshe dbang dpal bzang), also a grandson of Gushri Khan and a leading lama of Tashilhunpo. Galden Tsewang Pelzang was leader of the Ganden Phodrang’s forces during the Tibet-Ladakh war (1679–1684) and Galdan Tenzin Boshugtu Khan sent Galden Tsewang Pelzang reinforcement troops in 1684; *ibid.*: 70 and 250 fn 82.

sometimes disingenuous role of Tibetan religious dignitaries as mediators, has been greatly clarified by Peter Perdue's pioneering work *China Marches West*.<sup>16</sup>

As this intensely-fought Inner Asian power struggle continued decade after decade, Tibet—being the centre of the Buddhist religion predominantly embraced by the Zunghars—became increasingly embroiled<sup>17</sup> as different powerful individuals and factions in Tibet (both Tibetan and Mongol) took different sides. In the power vacuum left by the killing of the last regent of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Dési Sanggyé Gyatso (*sde srid* Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, 1653–1705) and the demotion of his protégé, the wayward Sixth Dalai Lama (d. 1706), a period of intense manoeuvring and scheming ensued, involving a variety of Tibetan and Mongolian players with their own independent abilities to muster armies. The military history of this and ensuing periods is treated expertly by Luciano Petech in his *China and Tibet in the Early 18th Century*, whose work in this field remains unrivalled.<sup>18</sup>

From the military perspective, Tibet's involvement in the Zunghar war reached its apex with the 1717 Zunghar invasion and occupation of central Tibet.<sup>19</sup> This occupation (1717–1720) spurred an escalation of the Qing's military involvement in Tibetan affairs, and in 1720 the Kangxi Emperor sent an army of 4,000 troops to expel the unpopular Zunghars and install the Seventh Dalai Lama (whom they had been protecting) as Tibet's ruler.<sup>20</sup>

From this time onwards, and until the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, the Manchus maintained (with many fluctuations along the way) some form of "protectorate" in Tibet,<sup>21</sup> which involved imperial representatives, known as *ambans*, staying at Lhasa along with a small imperial military guard. A series of military interventions by the Qing in Tibet over the course of the 18th century saw the gradual expansion and institutionalisation of this imperial garrison, along with a number of imperial reforms aimed at reshaping Tibet's own political and military institutions.<sup>22</sup>

The fluctuations in Qing military presence in Tibet during the 18th century reflected the level of political stability there. It is worth observing, that through all these fluctuations, not once did the Tibetan military forces of the Ganden Phodrang and the Qing imperial army meet

---

<sup>16</sup> Perdue 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Waley-Cohen 2006: 93.

<sup>18</sup> Petech [1950] 1972: 8–32.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*: 33–65.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*: 66–83.

<sup>21</sup> To use the expression favoured by Petech (*ibid.*: 74 and *passim*).

<sup>22</sup> See Travers 2015 for a discussion of the development of the Tibetan army as it appears in the successive Manchu reforms of the 18th century.



on opposing ends of a battlefield (with the exception of the battles that took place during the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911–1912 when the Tibetans expelled the remaining Sino-Manchu soldiers stationed there). Rather, despite moments of considerable tension—most notably around the events of 1750–1751—the dynamic between the Tibetan and Imperial forces tended to be one of co-operation and alliance. This co-operation was based on a convergence of political purpose, since both armies were ultimately oriented towards the same goal, namely the preservation and defence of the Dalai Lamas and the Ganden Phodrang's government of Tibet.

The Qing Imperial force sent to Tibet in 1720 was withdrawn in 1723.<sup>23</sup> But when the Tibetan minister Khangchenné (Khang chen nas Bsod nams rgyal po, also known in Tibetan sources by his Mongolian title Dai-ching Batur) was murdered by rival ministers in 1727, Tibet was plunged into a short civil war. This prompted the Qing again to send a force, which although it did not appear to have engaged in any fighting, gave its imprimatur to the ensuing peace, and imperial commanders oversaw the public execution of the conspirators in Lhasa. As with other periods, establishing the precise size of the military force sent on this occasion remains uncertain, with scholars' estimates ranging from 6,500<sup>24</sup> to 15,400<sup>25</sup> troops. It is interesting to compare this with available figures concerning the relative size of the Tibetan forces in the same period. Citing Qing archival documents, the contemporary Chinese scholar Feng Zhi states that Tibetan troops led by the Tibetan military leader Pholhané (Pho lha nas, 1689–1747) in 1728, numbered some 9,000,<sup>26</sup> while another 4,000 were also present at Lhasa, implying a total of at least 13,000 Tibetan soldiers,<sup>27</sup> i.e. larger or similar in size to the imperial expeditionary force. Even given the uncertainties over these numbers, the temporary presence in central Tibet of some 30,000 troops in total—both Tibetan and Sino-Manchu—at this time (and possibly more if the erstwhile troops of the ministerial conspirators that both these forces opposed are also factored in) at this time indicates the start of a period of unprecedented militarisation in Tibetan affairs.

Pholhané, a talented military commander and an astute politician, had quickly emerged victorious from this civil war. He then created a

---

<sup>23</sup> Petech [1950] 1972: 92–93.

<sup>24</sup> Feng 2006: 37.

<sup>25</sup> Petech 1972: 145. Composed of 400 Manchu bannermen and 15,000 Green Banner troops. Shakabpa (2010: vol. 1, 448) mentions the figure 10,000.

<sup>26</sup> As also stated by Petech 1972: 137.

<sup>27</sup> Feng 2006: 38. Comprising 9,000 soldiers under the command of Pholhané, and 4,000 more soldiers led to the Potala. The authors would like to express their indebtedness to Tamdrin Yangchen (Minzu University, Beijing) for her help translating Feng Zhi's article from Chinese.

new permanent Tibetan army, which laid the institutional foundations for the Tibetan army structure that would continue into the 20th century. According to Petech's sources, Pholhané's army around 1740 consisted of some 25,000 soldiers in total, including both infantry and cavalry.<sup>28</sup> If accurate, this would be a high-water mark in terms of troop numbers in the pre-20th century military history of the Ganden Phodrang.<sup>29</sup>

The 1728 Manchu intervention also marked the beginning of a permanent Qing imperial garrison stationed in Tibet, initially of 2,000 troops.<sup>30</sup> The size and significance of this garrison over the ensuing decades and centuries would vary greatly. In 1733 the number of imperial troops was reduced to a contingent of just 500, which in order to reduce pressures on the local population—and there is some evidence of resentment towards the foreign soldiery—was moved to a purpose-built barracks constructed outside Lhasa, at the nearby plain of Trapchi (Tib. Gra/Grwa bzhi).<sup>31</sup>

In 1747, Pholhané was succeeded as *de facto* "king" of Tibet by his son, Gyurmé Namgyel ("Gyur med rnam rgyal, also known by his Mongolian title Dalai Batur), who immediately took a very assertive attitude towards the Qing, demanding payment for the upkeep of the Qing garrison and the *ambans* at Lhasa, and clearly intent on the departure of the last remaining imperial soldiers. As a result of these pressures, the imperial garrison was further reduced in 1748 to just 100 men, a very small number when compared to the local Tibetan army. However, the conflict between Gyurmé Namgyel and the Qing representatives in Lhasa continued to intensify and in 1750, the Tibetan leader was murdered by the two *ambans* leading in turn to a Tibetan revolt against them—which Shakabpa suggests was led by the Tibetan military—<sup>32</sup>in which the two *ambans* were themselves killed.

The upshot of this was the Qing again sending a military force to restore peace. It was in the wake of this 1751 intervention—the closest we have to a Qing force entering Tibet in an oppositional role to the

---

<sup>28</sup> Petech [1950] 1972: 251. Petech states that "some incomplete accounts, extracted from the *Ta-ch'ing i-tung-chih*, depicting conditions about 1740, are found in Fr. Amiot, *Mémoires concernant les Chinois*, XIV, pp. 142–143 and 147, and in *Eine chinesische Beschreibung von Tibet* p. 22 and 24"; *ibid.*: 250 fn 1.

<sup>29</sup> See Travers 2015 for a discussion on the variation in numbers of the Tibetan army over this period.

<sup>30</sup> Petech [1950] 1972: 156.

<sup>31</sup> Mdo mkhar ba Tshe ring dbang rgyal 1981: 832; Petech [1950] 1972: 169; Feng Zhi 2006: 39.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*: 469–470.

Tibetan army (though by the time they arrived the rebellion had already been quelled)—<sup>33</sup>that significant political and military reforms were instituted. These included the abolition of the secular role of a “king” (Ch. *wang*) figure in Tibet (occupied by Pholhané and then his son),<sup>34</sup> and instead the formal concentration of political (and military) power in the hands of the Dalai Lamas and the *ambans*.

The reforms of 1751 saw not only a major reduction in the size of the Tibetan army from the time of the Pholha dynasty, but also its regularisation and reform. It also appears to be from this time that Tibetan troops began to be quartered next to the imperial barracks at Trapchi, a situation that would continue into the 20th century.<sup>35</sup> The extent to which the Tibetan and the Qing garrisons would henceforth interact and cooperate in matters such as training, lines of command and so on, remains little known in its details.

Over the course of the 18th century, as Waley-Cohen has shown, the Qing were recasting their own imperial culture in an increasingly martial mould.<sup>36</sup> One can only assume this also impacted the Tibetan army. From 1751 until the 20th century, the permanent Qing garrison in Tibet consisted (at least on paper) of 1,500 men.<sup>37</sup> These imperial troops included Manchu bannermen and Chinese soldiers from the western provinces in varying proportions.<sup>38</sup> It seems that most of the soldiers posted by the Qing in Lhasa were of Sichuanese origin, belonged the Green Standard Army, and served in three-year stints.<sup>39</sup> The Green Standard Army (Ch. *lüying guanbing* 綠營官兵), which made up the larger part of the Qing's imperial forces and consisted predominantly of ethnic Han soldiers, operated concurrently with the more prestigious Manchu-Mongol-Han Eight Banner armies. At present, the precise relationship between the Green Standard troops and the Banners, and the likely difference between their respective military cultures, is not very clearly understood and would benefit from further research.

---

<sup>33</sup> See Petech [1950] 1972: 223–225.

<sup>34</sup> As cited by Petech, “it was prescribed that henceforward no Tibetan could be granted the titles of Kha, *wang* or *beise*”; Petech [1950] 1972: 231.

<sup>35</sup> Shakabpa 2010: 473. As an illustration, see the Tibet and Chinese camps at Trapchi represented in the *Wise Collection* and reproduced in Diana Lange's article in this volume.

<sup>36</sup> Waley-Cohen 2006: 93.

<sup>37</sup> Petech [1950] 1972: 257.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*; Dai 2009: 82–83.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*; Elliot 2001: 412. Petech gives the example of the expeditionary force in 1728, composed of 15,000 Green Standard soldiers and 400 Manchu bannermen, see Petech [1950] 1972: 257.

It was in the late 1780s that central Tibet once again became an intense focus of military concern for the Qing authorities. The newly-ascendant Gorkha dynasty in Nepal invaded and occupied several southern Tibetan districts in 1788. This led to an unsatisfactory peace settlement negotiated by both Tibetan and Qing imperial officials, upon which the Tibetan authorities quickly reneged, leading to a second punitive invasion of central Tibet by the Gorkhas in 1791, in which Tashilhunpo monastery was raided and looted. This in turn spurred the largest military intervention by the Qing into Tibet—a force of some 20,000 under the command of the senior Manchu General Fuk’anggan (a confidante of the Qianlong emperor), and the veteran Evenk General Hailanca who led a contingent of crack Solun troops from China’s far northeast. The success of this major military intervention and the ensuing restructuring of Tibetan military and political affairs under the so-called *Twenty-nine Articles*, brought Tibet into greater formal integration with the Qing Empire than ever before, and began the period of Tibetan history that Petech has qualified as a “semi-colonial period”.<sup>40</sup>

There can be little doubt that the Qing imperial military presence in Tibet during the 19th century and beyond had a significant impact on Tibetan military culture. Nevertheless, Tibet throughout this period maintained its own distinct and separate army, whose degree of integration or subordination to the Qing garrisons remains unclear,<sup>41</sup> and likely fluctuated considerably over the decades. We do know however that formal relations between the two were strong. This is attested to by the simple fact that the regular Tibetan army of 3,000 troops are regularly referred to in Tibetan-language sources right up until the early 20th century as *gyajong* (Tib. *rgya sbyong*) meaning “Chinese-trained”.

---

<sup>40</sup> Petech 1959: 387. In this regard it is worth noting that, despite an apparently greater degree of alignment between the Tibetan military and the Qing Empire in this period, the Qing authorities were nevertheless unable to send reinforcement armies to assist Tibet in times of war, as for example in the case of the Tibetan-Dogra War of 1841 and Nepal-Tibetan War of 1855–1856. However, as recent scholarship (Schwieger 2015) has shown, the withdrawal of the Qing military involvement in Tibet in the 19th century did not mean the discontinuity of the Tibetan rulers’ reliance on the Qing emperor as a source of authority. This is also shown by the continued use of the “Golden Urn” for the selection of high incarnates into the 19th century as described by Oidtmann (2018).

<sup>41</sup> Fredholm (2007: 12) mentions that Tibetan troops and the Chinese garrison, which had previously operated together as a single army, separated in 1846. However, he does not give any primary source to back up this suggestion. For a discussion of this point, see Travers 2015: 256.

After the fall of the Qing Dynasty in China, the remnants of the imperial garrison were expelled from Tibet in 1912, inaugurating the period of Tibet's *de facto* independence (1913–1950). This was then followed by a major programme of military reform and modernisation initiated by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. The strategic choice taken by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in 1916 to adopt a British model for this programme, once again saw a foreign military model exerting a huge influence on Tibet's military history. This episode represents a particularly clear example of what we can call "influence through contact": in this case, contact first through invasion (1904), then military co-existence: from 1908 the British stationed small military escorts, which included Gurkha and Sikh soldiers, for their trade agents at Yatung (see photographs 3 and 4 in the appendix to this introduction) and Gyantse (see photograph 5). This presence contributed to perceptions of organisational and technological superiority, and spurred the will for reform and modernisation within Tibet's own military, particularly from 1916. Over the following decades, British influence on the Tibetan army became so strong that by the 1920s the Tibetan army was clothed in British-style military uniforms, marched to the tune of "God Save the Queen" played by its military band,<sup>42</sup> and was answering drill commands in English despite the soldiers' lack of familiarity with that language. In the late 1940s, these British-inspired practices were abandoned and gave way to a belated attempt by the Tibetan government to reclaim its national military identity and "re-Tibetanise" its army.<sup>43</sup> Compared to other periods of Tibet's military history, the period of British influence is relatively well-documented through photographs, diaries and personal testimonies, and has already attracted considerable amounts of research.

*A Focus on the Asian Influences on  
Tibet's "Military Culture" and Institutions*

The period of British influence on the Tibetan Army in the early 20th century is well-documented and certainly the best-known of the "foreign" influences exerted on Tibet's military history, and it is for this reason that this period has been excluded from the theme of the present volume, which instead focuses only on hitherto less-well-researched Asian influences. Our hope in doing so is to reclaim Tibet's military history from this well-known period of European dominance

---

<sup>42</sup> In the 1940s, the British observer could not recognise anymore the melody, see Stoddard 1985: 84.

<sup>43</sup> See Travers 2016.

by highlighting instead the almost three centuries of the Ganden Phodrang's military history *before* the adoption of the "British model".

Over the course of these centuries, from 1642 onwards, as this introduction has shown, Tibetan military forces were in many kinds of contact with other Asian military institutions and traditions, whether in situations of conflict, alliance, cooperation, rivalry or subordination, and in many cases, these had a major impact on Tibet's own army and its wider military culture. While by no means exhaustive, the eight articles of this volume explore some of these significant contacts between the Tibetan military and Mongol, Manchu, Chinese, and Japanese military models, based on sources not only in Tibetan but also in these respective languages. The very diversity of the source languages used for these articles, and hence the diversity of perspectives they embody, is thus a first step towards a "global history" of the Tibetan military that necessarily must be based on "multiple voices".

Federica Venturi's article, mainly based on the Fifth Dalai lama's own autobiography, ventures into some intriguing questions concerning relations between Mongol and Tibetan forces during the many military campaigns undertaken on behalf of the Ganden Phodrang government in the late-17th century. Hosung Shim analyses the strategic and technological innovations brought to Tibet by the Zunghar invasion and conquest of 1717–1720. Concerning the establishment of the Qing military protectorate in Tibet, George FitzHerbert's article looks at the establishment of "garrison temples" in Tibet serving Chinese troops there, and the contemporaneous adoption and adaptation of the Chinese martial deity, Guandi, worshipped at these temples, into Tibetan Geluk Buddhism and the popular conflation of this figure with the Inner Asian culture-hero Gesar/Geser.

Two of the articles relate more particularly to the *Twenty-nine Articles* of 1793 and their consequences for Tibetan army organisation and military culture. Ulrich Theobald discusses the way Chinese sources present the post-Gorkha War reforms as a paradigm shift for Tibetan military administration. Alice Travers' article addresses the question of whether and to what extent the military sections of the *Twenty-nine Articles* were actually implemented, both in the immediate aftermath of the Gorkha Wars (as reflected in the military career of Zurkhang Sichö Tseten) and in the longer run.

Diana Lange discusses visual representations of the Qing's political and military presence in central Tibet, as reflected in (among other sources) the map and illustrations of the so-called *Wise Collection* made by a Tibetan lama in the mid-19th century, which represent a precious primary source on a little-known period of Tibet's military history.

The volume also includes two illuminating articles on lesser-known aspects of Asian influences on Tibetan military history from the early

20th century. One concerns Zhang Yintang's attempts at a military reform of the Tibetan army from 1906 onwards, just before the fall of the Qing dynasty, which is the subject of Ryosuke Kobayashi's article (see photographs 1 and 2 in the appendix, illustrating the Sino-Manchu military presence in Tibet in the early 20th century). And the other concerns the role of the Japanese officer Yasujiro Yajima (see photograph 7), who was resident in Tibet between 1912 and 1918 and was employed by the Tibetan government both as an instructor for the Tibetan army, and to design a new Tibetan military barracks. This constitutes one of the last episodes of "Asian influence" on the Ganden Phodrang's army before it began to be disbanded following the Chinese Communist invasion and the ensuing *Seventeen-Point Agreement* of 1951.<sup>44</sup> The period between 1951 and 1959, when the remaining Tibetan regiments were incorporated into the People's Liberation Army, represents a final chapter of "Asian influence" on the Tibetan army during our period of research, but is not a topic covered by the contributions here.

This small ensemble of articles is by no means an exhaustive treatment of our theme. Among the more conspicuous gaps are the absence of any articles relating to the Dogra-Tibetan War of 1841–1842; the Nepal-Tibet war of 1855–1856; or the presence of a small Gorkha guard stationed in Lhasa to protect the Nepali trade representative until the 20th century (see photograph 6 in the appendix). Despite such *lacunae* the editors hope that this volume will represent a significant step towards a better understanding of the interconnectedness of Tibet's military history with that of its neighbours over the long period of the Ganden Phodrang's political ascendancy in Tibet.

---

<sup>44</sup> The *Seventeen-Point Agreement*, signed in May 1951, itself constitutes the beginning of the final important chapter in the history of the Ganden Phodrang army. Article 8 of that agreement stated that "Tibetan troops shall be reorganised by stages into the People's Liberation Army, and become a part of the national defence forces of the People's Republic of China". Following the flight into exile of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in 1959, all remaining remnants of the former Tibetan army were then integrated into the People's Liberation Army. In exile, another situation of contact with an Asian military culture occurred when the Indian Army created the Special Frontier Force in 1962, also known as "Establishment 22", in which Tibetan refugees were enrolled, including some former Tibetan soldiers of the Ganden Phodrang army.

## Photographic Appendix



*Photograph 1. "Chinese (Manchu) official with bodyguards at Yatung c. 1911". Photograph by Henry Martin. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. PRM-Martin-1998.293.136.*



*Photograph 2. "Chinese Firing Party", probably c. 1911. Photograph by Henry Martin. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. PRM-Martin-1998.293.130.*





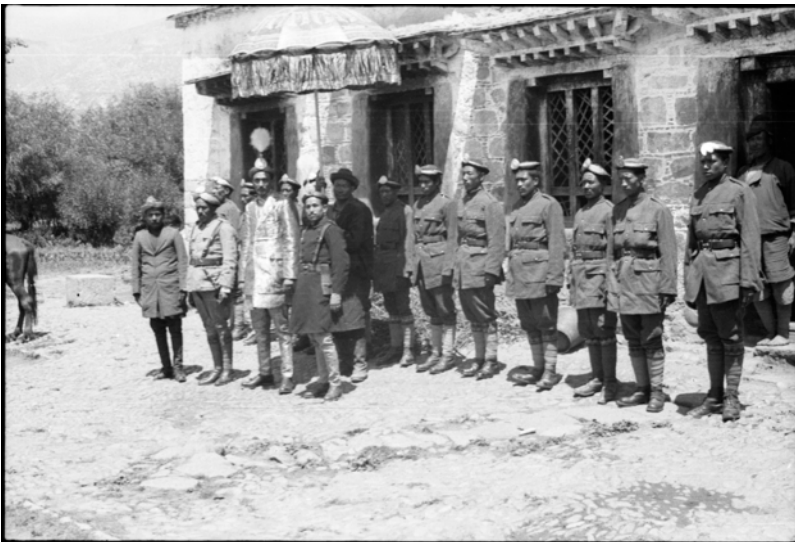
*Photograph 3. "David McDonald [British trade Agent] with Gurkha Police Escort in Yatung". Photograph by Henry Martin (no date). Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. PRM-Martin-1998.293.25.*



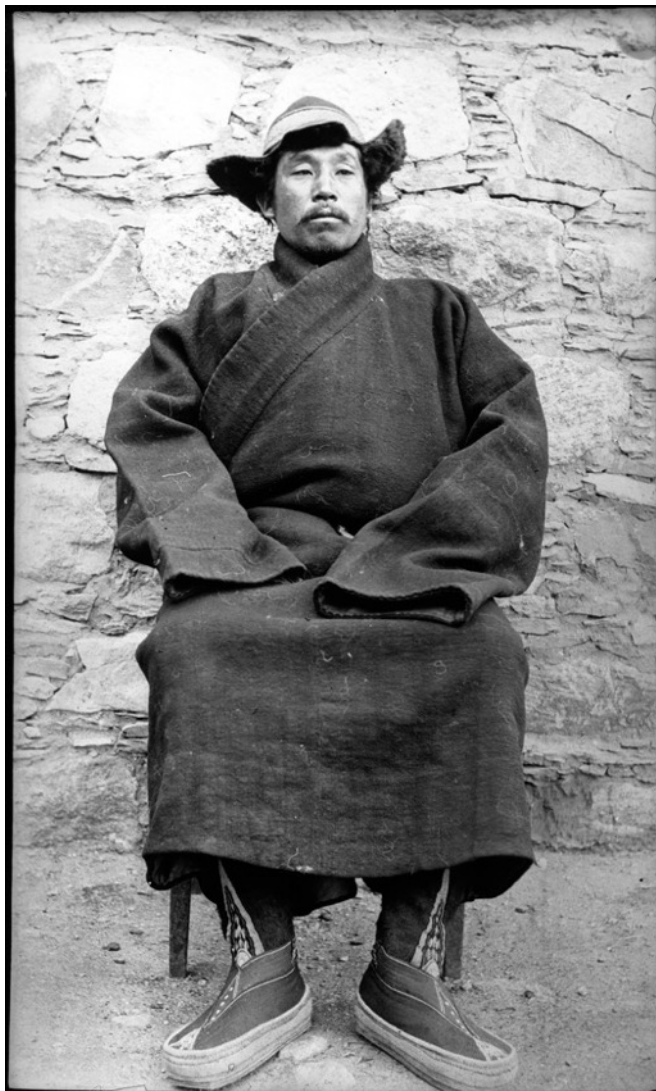
*Photograph 4. "Detachment at Yatung" [residence of the British Trade Agent] in 1914. Photograph by Henry Martin. Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. PRM-Martin-1998.293.11.*



*Photograph 5. Sikh Soldiers in the Mounted Escort of the British 13th Frontier Force at Gyantse [residence of the British Trade Agent] in 1927–1928. Photograph by A.J. Hopkinson. © The Trustees of the British Museum, London. N° RF148657. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.*



*Photograph 6. “Nepalese Agent Major Gambir Shamsheer Thapu Chattri and escort at Dekyi-lingka 19 August 1933”. Photograph by Frederick Williamson. The Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, Cambridge. This image is copyright. Reproduced by permission of University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology (P.96952.WIL).*



Photograph 7. "Yashojiro Yajima". Charles Bell Collection, Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.  
PRM-1998.285.584.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> This photograph was almost certainly taken during Yasujiro Yajima's stay in Lhasa (i.e. between 1912 and 1918). The Pitt Rivers Museum's *Tibet Album*, based on a comment about the photo in Charles Bell's "List of Illustrations" attributes it to Willoughby Patrick Rosemeyer and dates it tentatively to "1922?" (this being the earliest known date of Rosemeyer's presence in Tibet). However, Yajima is known to have stayed in Lhasa only until 1918, so one can surmise the photo must have been taken before that time. On Yasujiro Yajima, see the articles by Kobayashi and Komoto in this volume.



Photograph 8. "Ruthog Depon in the clothes of a Yaso with attendant", 1948. Photograph by H.E. Richardson British Museum n° 576537001© The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.



Photograph 9. Parade of cavalymen representing the standard bearers of Gushri Khan in the Mönlam State ceremonies. Photograph by A.J. Hopkinson, n°576575001© The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

### Bibliography

- Dai, Yincong. 2001. "The Qing State, Merchants, and the Military Labor Force in the Jinchuan Campaign" in *Late Imperial China*, 22(2): 35–90.
- . 2009. *The Sichuan Frontier and Tibet. Imperial Strategy in the Early Qing*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.
- Di Cosmo, Nicola (ed.). 2009. *Military culture in imperial China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Dwang slob mda' zur spyi 'thus rgyal rtse rnam rgyal dbang 'dus. 2003. *Bod rgyal khab kyi chab srid dang 'brel ba'i dmag don lo rgyus*, 2 vols. Dharamsala: Bod dmag rnying pa'i skyid sdug.
- Elliot, Mark. 2001. *The Manchu Way*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Feng, Zhi. 2006. "Qing dai la sa zha shen cheng bing ying li shi kao lue" ("Brief History of the Lhasa Zhashi [Trapchi] Barracks during the Qing Dynasty") in *Xizang daxue xuebao* 21. 1: 37–42.
- Fredholm, Michael. 2007. "The Impact of Manchu Institutions on Tibetan Military Reform". Unpublished paper at the 6th Nordic Tibet Conference, 5–6 May 2007, online.
- Gentry, James. 2016. *Power Objects in Tibetan Buddhism: The Life, Writings, and Legacy of Sokdokpa Lodrö Gyeltsen*. Leiden: Brill.
- Goldstein, Melvyn. 1993 [1989]. *A History of Modern Tibet. Volume 1: The Demise of the Lamaist State (1913–1951)*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.
- Gyaltse Namgyal Wangdue. 2010 (vol. 2) and 2012 (vol. 1). *Political and Military History of Tibet*. Translated by Yeshe Dhondup. Dharamsala: LTWA.
- Ishihama, Yumiko. 2004. "The Notion of "Buddhist Government" (*chos srid*) Shared by Tibet, Mongol and Manchu in the Early 17th Century" in Cüppers, Christoph (ed.), *The Relationship between Religion and State (chos srid zung 'brel) in Traditional Tibet*. Lumbini: Lumbini International Research Institute: 15–31.

- Karmay, Samten (trans.). 2014. *The Illusive Play: The Autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama*. Chicago: Serindia.
- Karsten, Joachim. 1983. "A note on Ya sor and the secular festivals following the Smon lam chen mo" in Steinkellner, Ernst and Helmut Tauscher (eds.), *Contributions on Tibetan language, history and culture, Proceedings of the Csoma de Kőrös Symposium, vol. 1*. Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, 117–149.
- Oidtmann, Max. 2018. *Forging the Golden Urn: The Qing Empire and the Politics of Reincarnation in Tibet*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Perdue, Peter. 2005. *China Marches West. The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Petech, Luciano. [1950] 1972. *China and Tibet in the early 18th century: History of the Establishment of Chinese Protectorate in Tibet*. Leiden: Brill.
- 1959. "The Dalai Lamas and Regents of Tibet: A Chronological Study" in *T'oung Pao*, Second Series, 47: 368–394.
- 1990. *Central Tibet and the Mongols. The Yüan-Sa-skyä Period of Tibetan History*. Rome: IsMEO.
- Richardson, Hugh. 1993. *Ceremonies of the Lhasa Year*. London: Serindia.
- Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. 1997. "Connected Histories: Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia", in *Modern Asian Studies*, 31(3): 735–762.
- Schwieger, Peter. 2015. *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China. A Political History of the Tibetan Institution of Reincarnation*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Shakabpa, Tsepon W.D. (trans. Derek Maher). 2010. *One Hundred Thousand Moons, An Advanced Political History of Tibet*. 2 vols. Leiden, Boston: Brill.
- Travers, Alice. 2015. "The Tibetan Army of the Ganden Phodrang in Various Legal Documents (17th–20th Centuries)" in Dieter Schuh (ed.), *Secular Law and Order in the Tibetan Highland. Contributions to a workshop organized by the Tibet Institute in Andiaast*

(Switzerland) on the occasion of the 65th birthday of Christoph Ciipers from the 8th of June to the 12th of June 2014, *MONUMENTA TIBETICA HISTORICA*, Abteilung III Band 13. Andiast: IITBS GmbH, 249–266.

- 2016, “The Lcags stag dmag khrim (1950): A new development in Tibetan legal and military history?,” in Bischoff J. and S. Mullard (eds.), *Social Regulation—Case Studies from Tibetan History*. Leiden: Brill, 99–125.

Travers, Alice and Federica Venturi, “Buddhism, Both the Means and the End of the Ganden Phodrang Army: An Introduction to Buddhism vis-à-vis the Military in Tibet (1642–1959)” in Travers, Alice and Federica Venturi (eds.), *Buddhism and the Military in Tibet during the Ganden Phodrang period (1642–1959)*, Special issue of the *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, EFEO, 27: 49–119.

Waley-Cohen, Johanna. 2006. *The Culture of War in China. Empire and the Military under the Qing Dynasty*. New York: Tauris & Co.

