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"Mom, Can I Become a Han Officer?" Childhood Memories, Politics, Emancipation and Intimacy in the Chinese-Written Autobiographical Essays of Blo gros chos mtsho, a Khampa Woman (1909/1910–1949)

Lara Maconi

(CRCAO & INALCO)

This article is about the previously untold history of a non-religious woman born in the turbulent first half of the 20th century in Eastern Tibet, her path to personal self-affirmation and emancipation, her strong, bold, and somewhat unconventional activities, and her radically innovative and modern autobiographical essays, narrated in the first person.[1] While it is widely acknowledged that Tibetan culture privileges women with relatively more freedom than is experienced by women in other parts of Asia, nevertheless women are virtually absent from the scene of mainstream written and oral Tibetan History/histories, which are dominated by male-centered patriarchal historical narratives. Histories of women – secular women in particular – have often remained voiceless, yet they do exist. They simply have not been valued or sufficiently told and documented. Because these narratives have not been transmitted or remembered, they have not become integrated within mainstream Tibetan historical and cultural discourses.

This article aims to give voice to Blo gros chos mtsho (aka Blo gros, Ch. Luozhe Qingcuo 羅哲情錯, 1909/1910-1949), a Khampa woman at the crossroads of epochs and cultures who was born into one of the most influential ruling families of Upper Nyarong (Tib. *Nyag stod*), the Rgya ri tshang. She was twenty when she was given in marriage to Ren Naiqiang 任乃强 (1894-1989), a prominent Han scholar, one of the

[1] Earlier versions of this article were presented at international seminars, conferences and workshops, notably: the 14th Seminar of the IATS (University of Bergen, Norway, June 19-25, 2016) where Yudru Tsomu (Sichuan University) and myself co-organised a panel entitled "Untold Histories of Women in the Making of Modern Tibet"; at the workshop "Global Lives and Local Perspectives" (University of Oxford, May 12-13, 2017); and at the international conference "The Body in East Asia's Modern and Contemporary Literatures" (Université Paris-Diderot, Nov. 16-18, 2017).

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fathers of Tibetology in China during the Republic of China (ROC). Their marriage gave birth to a lifelong, intellectually stimulating partnership and a fruitful cross-cultural and translinguistic cooperation, which resulted in truly remarkable scholarship and several publications.

This paper analyses Blo gros chos mtsho's personal journey and her cultural-cum-political activities, from her Nyarong (Tib. *Nyag rong*) origins and her status as a young Khampa woman who was illiterate in the Tibetan language, to her self-made education in oral and written Chinese after her marriage, her intellectual work in Chengdu and in Kham as her husband's assistant, her role as co-founder and executive director of the scholarly magazine *Kham-Tibet Studies Monthly* (Ch. *Kang Zang yanjiu yuekan* 康藏研究月刊), and her locally and nationally-oriented political views and activities. By analysing Blo gros chos mtsho's life and career through the lens of the political forces and cultural influences at work in Kham during the ROC period, I show the emblematic significance of her cross-cultural activities despite the fact that her story, for too long underestimated, has been left untold in both Tibetan and Chinese mainstream cultural discourses. This article also – and perhaps above all – explores the power of literacy in founding, provoking and affirming women's empowerment as well as the innovative reach of a previously unheard-of literary voice. This is all the more significant if one considers that Blo gros chos mtsho wrote in Chinese in the pre-Maoist period, at a time when few Tibetan women received any education at all and, more generally, few Tibetans were fluent and/or educated in Chinese.

Blo gros chos mtsho was not the only transfrontier woman who played a significant role in the political and cultural arena of the first half of the 20th century; I will discuss a few others later in this article. Here it suffices to point out that, from this point of view, her example serves as a significant intellectual case-study for a small group of intellectuals, female and male, who anticipated Sino-Tibetan dynamics and activities that were to fully develop in the (post-)Maoist years to come, thus showing some continuities – and not only ruptures – between pre-Maoist and (post-)Maoist times.

1. Blo gros chos mtsho's autobiographical writings

Blo gros chos mtsho was not a very prolific writer; she published only two autobiographical essays at the very end of her short life, while very nearly upon her deathbed. These writings – alongside a long biographical essay posthumously written by Ren Naiqiang to commemorate his wife's premature death, as well as first-hand oral, written and

visual materials mainly collected during fieldwork – constitute the main sources on which this article is based.[2] Blo gros chos mtsho's essays are both written with the "I" (Ch. *wo* 我) of first-person narrative. Her first piece – "My Proposal to the National Assembly" (Ch. *Wo zai Guomin dahui de ti'an* 我在國民大會的提案, 1948) – is a four-page-long piece where Blo gros chos mtsho discusses her political views on the conflictual Sino-Khampa relations at the time, and explains the problem-solving propositions she elaborated and submitted to the 1948 National Assembly in Nanjing. The second essay – "My Homeland" (Ch. *Wo de jiaxiang* 我的家鄉, 1949) – is a much longer nine-section piece which, in chronological terms, progresses from Blo gros chos mtsho's childhood at Rab ru estate in Nyarong to her personal and professional projects at the time of writing.[3] Blo gros chos mtsho's writings are the expression of a certain literary modernity: her language is simple and vernacular; her style is direct and unadorned; her tone is intimate, almost introspective: it is disarming in its sincerity and genuineness. If the notion of literary modernity implies a focus on the *individual self*, the *inner self*, one's *human intimacy*, and, consequently, the *embodied self* and *corporeality*, then Blo gros chos mtsho represents a very interesting modern intellectual figure, with all the ambivalences that such modernity implies.

Histories of literary modernity – East Asian literary modernity in particular – have often begun as historiographies of the narrative self, with a focus on the singular individual, a fascination with the psychologized self, an attention to bodily sensations and representations, a

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[2] Blo gros chos mtsho's autobiographical essays are entitled "My Proposal at the National Assembly" (Ch. *Wo zai guomin dahui de ti'an* 我在國民大會的提案; see Luozhe Qingcuo, 1948) and "My Homeland" [Ch. *Wo de jiaxiang* 我的家鄉, two installments; see Luozhe Qingcuo, 1949a and Luozhe Qingcuo, 1949b]. For Ren Naiqiang's biographical essay, "Mourning Blo gros chos mtsho" (Ch. *Dao Luozhe Qingcuo* 悼羅哲情錯), see Ren Naiqiang, 1949.

[3] "My Homeland" (Ch. *Wo de jiaxiang*) was published by two installments for a total of nine sections in all. The titles of the sections are: 1. "I abandoned my homeland" (Ch. *Wo gufu le zhe jiaxiang* 我孤負了這家鄉), 2. "Lofty Rab ru estate" (Ch. *Wei'e de Raolu guanzhai* 巍峨的饒祿官寨), 3. "Sister 'Chi med's tragic death" (Ch. *Cansi de ajie Quemo* 慘死的阿姊却墨), 4. "Unforgettable May 6" (Ch. *Bu neng wang de wu yue chu liu* 不能忘的五月初六), 5. "The most faithless people in the world" (Ch. *Shi shang zui wu xinyi de ren* 世上最無信義的人), 6. "Our monastery" (Ch. *Women de lama si* 我們的喇嘛寺), 7. "Revenge" (Ch. *Baofu* 報復), 8. "Leaving the Dharma" (Ch. *Likai le fofa* 離開了佛法), 9. "What I would like to undertake" (Ch. *Wo xiang zuo de shiye* 我想做的事業); see Luozhe Qingcuo, 1949a; Luozhe Qingcuo, 1949b.

vernacularization of writing, and the emergence of highly-personalized self-referential literary genres.[4] Autobiography has played a crucial role in this, and the writing of autobiographical selves – the so-called modern subjects – as secularized and temporalized singular individuals has usually been considered as an important topic in modernity studies.[5] These features of modernity are also crucial in Blo gros chos mtsho's autobiographical essays, and, in this sense, her writings provide an interesting site to explore the complex interaction between continuity and rupture that is so crucial to questions about modernity, and Tibetan modernity in particular.[6]

Autobiography and, more generally speaking, the rich bulk of Tibetan life-writing produced up unto the 20th century, mainly consisted of traditional religious life writings, hagiographies in the form of *rnam thar*, which proposed almost exclusively male models of saint-hood and spiritual accomplishment, with very few female-centered examples.[7] Autobiographical writings by women were even rarer, since women "encountered difficulties in merely trying to produce religious literature" and faced strictures against writing.[8] Full-fledged lay autobiographies describing personalized and secularized selves, mainly government officials and noblemen, were also very few before the 20th century. They were written by men, about men, and largely drew on the traditional genre of religious *rnam thar*.[9]

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4 Only for China, for example, there exists an impressive amount of scholarly literature on the subject; see for instance R. Hegel and R. Hessney (eds.), 1985; J. Průšek, 1980; Lydia Liu, 1995; and J. Ng, 2003. As far as Tibet is concerned, scholarship examining the "apparition of the self" in life writing includes, among others, S. G. Karmay, 1988; J. Gyatso, 1992; J. Gyatso, 1998.

5 See P. Burke, 2011; K. J. Weintraub, 1982.

6 For scholarship on the debated question of modernity in Tibet, see R. Barnett and S. Akiner (eds.), 1994; R. Barnett and R. Schwartz (eds.), 2008; M. C. Goldstein, 1989; M. C. Goldstein, D. Sherap, W. R. Siebenschuh, 2004; M. T. Kapstein (ed.), 2009; H. Stoddard, 1986; G. Tuttle, 2005; G Tuttle (ed.), 2011.

7 For scholarly works on women in Tibetan culture and on female-centered *rnam thar*, see for example A. Chayet, 1993; H. Diemberger, 2007; H. Fjeld and T. Hofer (eds.), 2010-2011; H. Gayley, 2017; H. Havnevik, 1989, 1997, 1998; H. Havnevik and J. Gyatso (eds.), 2006; S. H. Jacoby, 2014; C. Makley, 2007; K. R. Schaeffer, 2004; N. Schneider, 2013; J. Willis (ed.), 1989; Y. Tsomu, 2018.

8 See K. R. Shaeffer, 2004, p. 53. Kurtis R. Shaeffer eloquently explores the example of the hermitess O rgyan chos skyid (1675-1729), who was forbidden to write her *Life* by her master precisely because of her gender (K. R. Shaeffer, 2004, p. 53-56). In a similar vein, Hanna Havnevik explains that the female master Rje btsun Blo chen rin po che (1856-1951) too, experienced strictures against writing because of her gender (H. Havnevik, 1998, p. 101).

9 Regarding proto-modern non-religious Tibetan life writing, see, for example, L. Hartley, 2011; other early-20th century examples of lay autobiographies are mentioned in J. Gyatso, 2011, p. 18-19. Regarding the evolution of the genre of *rnam thar* into so called anglophone "new-age" *rnam thar*, see L. H. McMillin, 2001.

Thus, with respect to the Tibetan life-writing tradition, and the Tibetan tradition *tout court*, Blo gros chos mtsho was not only *innovative* because she wrote in Chinese at a time when Chinese was rarely practiced by Tibetans as a literary language; she was also *ground-breaking* because she wrote in the genre of modern individual-centred self-reflexive life writing, and in a style – direct introspective realism – which was almost unheard of in the Tibetan literary tradition.[10] Furthermore, Blo gros Chos mtsho was *modern*, because she was fully conscious of the newness of her trajectory; she was determined to participate in the larger movement of transformation and innovation which Kham was undergoing during the first half of the 20th century. Writing for her became, among other activities, a way of inscribing herself within both her birth world (Kham/Tibet) and her chosen world (Han environment/China).[11]

2. Where histories connected: Nyarong and the Kham region of Eastern Tibet[12]

The Kham region of Eastern Tibet, and its geopolitical and cultural configuration during the first half of the 20th century, is central to this article, not only because Blo gros chos mtsho and her entourage were from Kham, but also because their stories were deeply intermingled with Kham local histories and the macro-history of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands. The *dramatis personæ* of this article were proactive agents of those histories as much as those histories constitutively contributed

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[10] Blo gros chos mtsho's literary form and content were more in line with the new aspirations and innovations introduced in Chinese literature starting from the first decades of the 20th century, during the May Fourth period and the emergence of a modern Chinese literature. One of those aspirations was the elaboration of a new national literature written not in the classical language, but in the vernacular language. Experimenting with innovative, modern, non-Confucian ways of writing lives and exploring the self was also an important aspect of the intellectual endeavors of modern Chinese writers; see, for example, K. A. Denton, 1998; M. Dryburgh, S. Dauncey (eds.), 2013.

[11] I refer here to the observations that "newness alone is not enough to comprise modernity" and that the "degree of self-consciousness of newness" is paramount in defining modernity elaborated by F. Jameson, 2002, and developed for the Tibetan case by Janet Gyatso. See also S. Kaviraj, 2005a; and S. Kaviraj, 2005b; see J. Gyatso, 2011, p. 13-15.

[12] This subtitle refers to the expression "connected histories" first introduced by Sanjay Subrahmanyam for the Eurasian case and adopted by Janet Gyatso to signify the importance of geographical, cultural, but also conflictual, contacts and interactions to explore the question of Tibet and modernity; see J. Gyatso, 2011, p. 10-11, quoting S. Subrahmanyam, 1997.

to shaping their personalities, commitments and life paths. These individuals lay at the confluence of Kham's endogenous and exogenous tensions and ties, local concerns and national preoccupations, internal feuds and external negotiations, fights and reconciliations, Chinese expansionism, Lhasa interventionism and Khampa resistance.

Kham was at that time a conglomeration of *de facto* autonomous self-governed principalities ruled by local "kings" (Tib. *rgyal po*), "governors" (Tib. *sde dpa*) and "chieftains" (Tib. *dpon po*) which were often involved, one against another, in bloody conflicts. Nyarong, the "Iron Knot" (Tib. *lcags mdud*) of Tibet, was no exception, and beside being the "Land of Flowers" (Tib. *me tog yul*) romantically recalled by Ama Adhe in her memoirs, it was also – and perhaps above all – a land of "honor and pride", of "fighting warriors", of "interminable feuds" and "bloody revenge"; a land where "a rifle was an essential part of a man's life; […and] families fought against families, tribes against tribes, often for reasons that were so buried in the past that even the protagonists were not very sure of what they were fighting about […]".[13] Nyarong was thus a region where manliness – and sometime womanliness – were defined in terms of heroism, bravery and fighting spirit. Khampa collective memory and Tibetan national narratives abound with stories of heroes and heroines, of brave fearless men and women fighters. Consider Mgon po rnam rgyal (1799-1865), the "blind warrior of Nyarong" who dominated the Kham political scene in the 19th century; or Aten, the anti-Maoist resistant warrior depicted by Jamyang Norbu in *Warriors of Tibet*; and Ama Adhe (b. 1932) and her group of resistant women who passed on supplies and intelligence to Khampa guerrilla fighters in the 1950s.[14] But consider also Rgya ri 'Chi med grol ma (1905-1939), the amazon woman whose exploits and feats have inspired legends and poems; and the "Four rivers, six ranges" (Tib. *Chu bzhi gang drug*) warrior Rgya ri nyi ma (1920s-year of death missing) and his anti-Maoist revolt-leader wife, Rdo rje g.yu sgron, whose histories are directly connected with the stories explored in this article.[15]

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[13] See Jamyang Norbu, 1986, p. 32. For the characterization of Nyarong as the "Iron Knot" of Tibet, see Yudru Tsomu, 2015, p. 60. For Nyarong as the "Land of Flowers", see Adhe Tapontsang, 1997, p. 5. For scholarly studies on 19th-20th-century Kham, Nyarong, and Sino-Tibetan relations see, for example, L. Epstein, 2002; S. Gros (ed.), 2014; S. Gros (ed.), 2016; Lin Hsiao-ting, 2006; Yudru Tsomu, 2015.

[14] For more information on Mgon po rnam rgyal, see Yudru Tsomu, 2015; for Aten, see Jamyang Norbu, 1986; for Ama Adhe, see Adhe Tapontsang, 1997.

[15] Rdor rje g.yu sgron, one of Rgya ri nyi ma's wives, led a revolt against the Chinese in Nyarong in 1956 (on Rdor rje g.yu sgron and Rgya ri nyi ma, see Carole McGranaham, 2010, p. 80-85). Rgya ri nyi ma, Rdor rje g.yu sgron, and the legendary Rgya ri 'Chi med sgrol ma were all relevant members of the same family, the

Resistance to external forces was just as constitutive of Nyarong – and the whole of Kham in general – as intra-Khampa conflicts. Throughout their history, Kham principalities fought to preserve their autonomy from both Lhasa and its recurrent annexing manoeuvers, and from China with its expansionist and integrationist politics. Nationalist China in particular was interested in controlling and annexing Kham, and one important reason among many was to secure an easy access route to central Tibet, and eventually to rule it (a policy called *an Kang zhi Zang* 安康治藏, "pacifying Kham to rule Tibet"). The transfer of the ROC capital from Nanjing to Chongqing following the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), and the massive exodus of the Chinese population and institutions from the Eastern coastal regions to the Southwestern borderlands to escape the Japanese bombings, also contributed to fostering the idea among Chinese politicians and intelligentsia that it had become urgent to effectively pacify and administer the no-longer remote Southwestern frontiers, and particularly Kham. The "barbarians" had now become neighbours; acquiring a deeper knowledge of their distinctive cultures and habits became a crucial issue for the integrity of the Republic and for the pacific cohabitation between the local populations and the newly arrived urbanites.[16]

The Chinese venture in Kham – which had already begun during the Qing dynasty with the establishment of a military and administrative presence there – was maintained during the ROC period, while measures aiming at promoting the social integration and cultural assimilation of Kham people into the ROC were reinforced, at least on paper. Alongside military incursions, territorial administration, mining exploitation and the support of a settler economy in Kham, these culturally-oriented measures were crucial for the consolidation of the ROC. Three of these measures are particularly relevant here since they saw the direct and proactive involvement of the figures presented in this article. The first was the implementation of Chinese-language ed-

Rgya ri tshang, of which Blo gros chos mtsho (whose history is central to this article) is a member too. Their family relations will become clearer later in my analysis. Regarding the historical/legendary tones which are popularly used to recall Rgya ri 'Chi med sgrol ma's feats, I will later write in this article about Blo gros chos mtsho's description of 'Chi med sgrol ma's heroic profile. Lodi Gyari Rinpoche – special envoy to the 14th Dalai Lama in the USA and 'Chi med sgrol ma's grandson – noted, in a personal communication, that "songs and poems have been written in her ['Chi med sgrol ma's] honor and even Bapa Phuntsok Wangyal composed a song about her heroic deed to inspire Tibetan Nationalism." (Lodi Gyari Rinpoche, personal email communication, May 6, 2016).

16 On the issue of the cohabitation/confrontation between the locals and the newcomers on the Southwestern frontiers, Kham in particular, and the mutual visions of the "other", see L. Maconi, 2014.

ucational and schooling programs sponsored by the Chinese government to spread Chinese as the "official language" (Ch. *guanhua* 官話) in Kham and Eastern Tibet, thus establishing the basis for the cultural assimilation of the Tibetan population and the embryonic spread of Sinophone literacy in Eastern Tibet.[17] The second was the initiation of state-funded exploratory programs and fieldwork research in Eastern Tibet, Kham in particular, with the emergence of new disciplines (sociology, archaeology, anthropology, Chinese tibetology) and new scholars working in collaboration with local people, mainly as informants or guides, but also as colleagues.[18] The third was the creation of the first journals specialized in Tibetan and Khampa issues, launched with Chinese initiative and Tibetan cooperation. These journals were mostly written in Chinese, with occasional minor sections in Tibetan, the latter language often handwritten or in Latin-alphabet transliterations.[19]

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17 The first China-implemented Chinese-language school in Kham was created in Batang in 1904. Since the very beginning of Chinese schooling programs, emphasis was put on the importance of enrolling the "children of the barbarians" (Ch. *man zidi* 蠻子弟). As I showed in previous papers and in a forthcoming article, since Khampa families were reluctant, if not hostile, to send their siblings to Chinese schools, they devised several "avoidance strategies" to resist what they considered as a compulsory "corvée". One can safely say that the ROC schooling and educational programs in Kham were not very effective and enjoyed very limited success among the Khampa. See L. Maconi, forthcoming; L. Maconi, oral paper, 2018; and L. Maconi, oral paper, 2019.

18 Among the Chinese scholars who pioneered new disciplines at the beginning of the 20th c. making investigations in Chinese Southwestern regions, there are geologists such as Ding Wenjiang 丁文江 (1887-1936, PhD in Scotland), sociologists such as Ke Xiangfeng 柯象峰 (1900-1983) and Xu Yitang 徐益棠 (1896-1953, PhDs in France), ethnologists-cum-sociologists such as Ma Changshou 馬長壽 (1907-1971), archeologists such as Wu Jinding 吳金鼎 (1901-1948, PhD at the University of London), and the pioneers of China Tibetology: Rdo rje spyod pa (aka Paul Sherap, Ch. Xie Guo'an 謝國安, 1887-1966), Ren Naiqiang 任乃强 (1894-1989), Li Anzhai 李安宅 (1900-1985, PhD in the USA), and Liu Liqian 劉立千 (1910-2008). I will deal later in this article with Ren Naiqiang, Paul Sherap and Liu Liqian's common intellectual projects and activities.

19 In my personal archives, I could list ca. 103 Sino-Tibetan periodicals which were launched in the first half of the 20th century, which had a more or less ephemeral duration and life, and which can be regarded as specialized in Kham and Tibet issues (that is they deal with Kham and Tibet-related issues for ca. 80%/90% of their content, the rest mostly dealing with other ethnicities or regions included in the Xikang 西康 province). Of these 103 periodicals, 98 are in Chinese, 2 in Tibetan, 3 are in Chinese with some Tibetan-language sections. One of them, the *Kham-Tibet Studies Monthly* (Ch. *Kang Zang yanjiu yuekan* 康藏研究月刊, Chengdu, 1946-1949), is of particular interest in this article, as will become clear later.

3. Reconstructing Blo gros chos mtsho's family histories

Blo gros chos mtsho belonged to a family where leadership was a tradition, both for men and women. Apart from a few biographical data, we possess very little information regarding her early childhood up until the age of seven. We know that she was born in Dpal yul in 1909 or 1910 to an influential ruling family. Her father, Rgyal ba mtshan dpe (dates of birth and death unknown), was the chieftain of the Sde yung tribe in Dpal yul. Her mother, Sgrol ma chos mtsho (dates of birth and death unknown), was a member of one of the most prominent Khampa families of that time – the Rgya ri tshang, rulers of Upper Nyarong – and was the sister of Rgya ri Rdo rje rnam rgyal (dates of birth and death unknown), the authoritative chieftain of Upper Nyarong (Tib. *Nyag stod dpon po*). It was in fact the maternal branch of the family – the Rgya ri tshang – that was to play a crucial role in Blo gros's life after the age of seven: she was adopted by the Rgya ri tshang, she was raised by them and with them as a full member of the family, as one of their daughters. The story goes that Blo gros chos mtsho was seven when her parents were killed in one of the multiple feuds in which their tribe was engaged. Their Dpal yul *rdzong* (fortress-house) was destroyed and Blo gros and her elder brother, Che gros (dates of birth and death unknown), were captured by the enemy and kept in seclusion.[20] They were finally released after long and costly negotiations conducted in person by Rgya ri Rdo rje rnam rgyal, their maternal uncle and the chieftain of Upper Nyarong.

It was in these tragic circumstances that Blo gros chos mtsho arrived at Rab ru estate, the majestic residence of the Rgya ri clan in Upper Nyarong. In the early 1920s, the Rgya ri family found itself with no sons, only two daughters. The eldest was 'Chi med sgrol ma (1905-1939), the heroic woman warrior who made her name a legend throughout Eastern Tibet thanks to her leadership in battles against rival clans, the "red" Chinese soldiers of the Long March who passed through Kham in 1935, as well as against the Chinese Nationalist army of Liu Wenhui 劉文輝.[21] She was eventually captured and executed by

[20] I possess conflicting information about Blo gros chos mtsho's big brother's name. Ren Naiqiang – who, in his essay, provides accurate Latin-alphabet transliterations of Tibetan toponyms and personal names – calls him "Che gros" (Ren Naiqiang, 1949, p. 4); whereas Lodi Gyari Rinpoche, in a personal communication, names him "Chos bdag" (Lodi Gyari Rinpoche, personal email communication, May 6, 2016).

[21] Liu Wenhui 劉文輝 (1895-1976), one of the warlords of Sichuan province during China's Warlord era, became the Governor of Xikang Province from 1939 to 1950. Xikang became an official province of the ROC and early PRC from 1939 to 1955,

the Nationalists in 1939, remaining "proud and defiant, even in her final moment before the firing squad".[22] Blo gros chos mtsho recalls this tragedy in her long nine-chapter essay "My Homeland" remembering 'Chi med's masculine outfit, her awe-inspiring look, her bold horsemanship, the excellence of her archery skills, and the exquisite elegance of her Tibetan calligraphy.[23] Raised as a potential clan leader, 'Chi med sgrol ma was the only daughter of the family who received an education (only in Tibetan, not in Chinese), a thing which aroused Blo gros chos mtsho's greatest admiration. The second sister was called Dpal mo sgrol ma (?-early 1930s).[24] Blo gros chos mtsho recalls her elegance and beauty, the delicacy of her features, and her composure and reserve as boys courted her. Since there was no male heir in the Rgya ri tshang, an arrangement was made, as was often the case in Tibet at that time, by which a family would take a young man as an adoptive bridegroom or matrilocally resident husband (Tib. *mag pa*), who would take on his wife's family name, and live with them to carry on the hereditary line. Dpal mo sgrol ma thus took as her bridegroom Dbang phyug rdo rje (dates of birth and death unknown) from the Zhi ba family, a very influential and prominent family from Dkar mdzes rdzong.[25] They had a son, Rgya ri nyi ma rgyal mtshan (aka Rgya ri nyi ma, 1920s-year of death missing), the only male heir, who would later become the new chieftain of Upper Nyarong and, in later Maoist times, a member of the "Four river six ranges" (Tib. *Chu bzhi sgang drug*) volunteer resistance army that tried to drive the PRC occupational forces out of Tibet and led the 14th Dalai Lama out of Lhasa and into exile in 1959. That same year, the whole Rgya ri family would flee into exile.[26]

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it comprised most of the Kham region, its capitals were Kangding 康定 (Tib. Dar rtse mdo, 1939-1951) and Ya'an 雅安 (Tib. G.yag rna, 1951-1955).

22 I quote here Jamyang Norbu, 1986, p. 53.

23 See Luozhe Qingcuo, 1949a, p. 19-20. Blo gros chos mtsho dedicates the 3rd paragraph of "My Homeland" (Ch. *Wo de jiaxiang*) to the depiction of her adoptive family, including 'Chi med grol ma and the circumstances of her death (title of this paragraph: "Elder Sister 'Chi med's Tragic Death", Ch. *Cansi de azi Quemo*).

24 The second sister is named "Dpon mo sgrol ma" (and not "Dpal mo sgrol ma") in Ren Naiqiang, 1949. Lodi Gyari Rinpoche, Yudru Tsomu and a few oral informants, however, refer to her as Dpal mo sgrol ma (see Lodi Gyari Rinpoche, personal email communication, May 6, 2016; and Yudru Tsomu, 2018, p. 119).

25 The family name of Dbang phyug rdo rje is spelled "Shes ba" in Ren Naiqiang, 1949, whereas it is referred to as "Zhi ba" in Yudru Tsomu, 2018, p. 119. Oral information collected during fieldwork is contradictory concerning the correct spelling.

26 Even though Dpal mo sgrol ma is Rgya ri nyi ma's biological mother, it is generally believed that his mother was 'Chi med sgrol ma. This is due to the fact that Dpal mo sgrol ma died very young and Rgya ri nyi ma was raised by his grandfather, Rgya ri Rdo rje rnam rgyal, and his aunt, 'Chi med sgrol ma. In fact, since Zhi ba Dbang phyug rdo rje married into the Rgya ri family, he was wedded to both the

The union of the Rgya ri tshang and the Zhi ba tshang families was, from the very beginning, fraught with conflict and dispute. It provoked a shift in the balance of alliances which brought about one of the most devastating and tragic family feuds of that era, resulting in the loss of hundreds of lives, including the death of Zhi ba Dbang phyug rdo rje and the displacement of a large number of families. It created havoc and instability in the whole region for decades. Many parties were involved in the war, but the tragedy in all this was that "it was not a Gyari vs Shiwatsang feud, it was a Gyari vs Gyari feud". (Lodi Gyari Rinpoche, personal email communication, May 6, 2016).[27]

Blo gros chos mtsho writes extensively about all these feuds and acts of revenge and violence in "My Homeland" (Ch. *Wo de jiaxiang*). She mixes detailed factual descriptions and personal reflections, notably about her visceral and constant fear of losing all her family in those feuds, and about her ambivalent feelings when considering the outsider Han as the only possible solution for stopping the never-ending chain of revenge. Very early on, she developed an inclination to opt for mediation, negotiation and non-conflictual solutions, and she was glad when, at the age of twenty, she was given in marriage to the man who successfully served as a negotiator in one of the bloody feuds in which her family was mired. The man who acquired the respect and the gratitude of the whole Rgya ri tshang, and who was given the privilege of marrying one of the Rgya ri daughters, was called Ren Naiqiang 任乃强 (1894-1989), a prominent Han scholar, a geographer, and one of the fathers of Tibetology in China.

Rgya ri sisters. I thank all my interlocutors for helping me to retrace Blo gros chos mtsho's family relations: Lodi Gyari Rinpoche, Rgya ri nyi ma's eldest son, who kindly agreed to elucidate some factual information about his family (Lodi Gyari Rinpoche, personal email communication, May 6, 2016), but also all those who asked for anonymity.

[27] Lodi Gyari Rinpoche further explains: "This feud came to a natural end when my father became of age and regained total control of the family's domain because as the only son he was precious to both factions of the family. However, revenge killing resulting from this conflict continued until the Chinese communist occupation because even though the Gyari family feud had ended, many people who had lost family members during the Gyari vs Gyari war continued to pursue revenge, as was the custom back then. It is now finally over and there has been an extraordinary reconciliation. When my father died, he was free from sorrow because the deep division and animosity among the Gyari clan relatives and friends had come to an end" (Lodi Gyari Rinpoche, personal email communication, May 6, 2016).

Fig. 1 — Blo gros chos mtsho and husband Ren Naiqiang
Unknown photo studio, Chengdu, late 1930s-early 1940s
Private collection - Courtesy of Ren family member

A fine intellectual, Ren Naiqiang was also a fieldworker who explored the Kham region extensively at a time when the ROC was sponsoring explorations of its barely known Southwestern frontier regions, Kham in particular, in order to control and annex these regions not only *de jure* but also *de facto*. Among other scholarly work, Ren Naiqiang pioneered the field of China Gesar studies with the introduction, in the 1930s, of the first Chinese translations of some episodes of the Gesar epics, which he named the "Barbarian Romance of the Three Kingdoms" (Ch. *Man san guo* 蠻三國).[28] Having graduated from the Beijing

[28] For a thorough account of Ren Naiqiang's pioneering studies in the *Gesar Epics*, see Ren Xinjian, 2011; for an analysis of the beginning of China gesarology and tibetology, see L. Maconi, 2004, p. 389-400. Ren Naiqiang's first publication about the *Gesar Epics* dates back to May 1930 when he published the results of his first-hand collected Gesar-related fieldwork findings by installments in the *Sichuan Daily* (Ch. *Sichuan ribao* 四川日報). Those installments included: 1. an introduction to the *Barbarian Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Ch. *Man san guo* 蠻三國), that is the *Gesar Epics*; 2. the translation of an abstract from the *Bdud 'dul* episode (Defeating the Demon-King of the North). He subsequently published other translations and studies of the *Gesar Epics*. The title Ren Naiqiang gave to the *Gesar Epics* – *Man san guo* – evokes the Chinese classics *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 (*Romance of the Three Kingdoms*), a possible example here of the "narrative of similarity" (that is, supporting "ideas of unity and common origins" between the Khampa and the Han) which Yudru Tsomu mentioned in one of her articles (Yudru Tsomu, 2013, p. 333-334, p.

Advanced College of Agriculture (Ch. *Beijing gaodeng nongye xuetang* 北京高等農業學堂) in 1920 – that is in the years of the democratic movement of 1919 – Ren Naiqiang was above all an explorer who travelled the Kham region studying its geography, history and society, habits and customs, agriculture, forestry and animal husbandry. He produced fascinating ethnography of the region at a time when the Chinese cultural world had very limited knowledge of its remote and "barbarian" frontier regions, Kham included.[29]

Ren Naiqiang met Blo gros chos mtsho in 1929, during a one-year fieldtrip to nine different counties in Kham, including Upper Nyarong. He had been appointed as inspector of the Sichuan borderland by provincial governor Liu Wenhui and during the few months he spent in Nyarong, he stayed at the palace of the Rgya ri tshang. This presented a privileged position to observe the local ruling family's habits and customs, relations, alliances and conflicts, and its governance strategies. In this regard, the marriage with one of the daughters of the family, which was proposed to him as a sign of confidence and respect, was an unexpected opportunity for close ethnological observation. Blo gros married Ren Naiqiang (whom she refers to in her writings by his courtesy name of Xiaozhuang 筱莊) officially as a Rgya ri daughter, with the Rgya ri tshang organizing an elaborate and sumptuous Tibetan-style wedding and offering a generous dowry.

After their wedding in 1930, the couple moved to Chengdu where the rest of the Ren family had settled. Blo gros gave birth to three children, but in the family there were other children and another wife; importantly, Blo gros had not married a single man: she had married a married man.[30] Ren Naiqiang's "first wife" (Ch. *da fu* 大婦), Qing Yizhi

338). The use of the term "Man" 蠻 (barbarian) shows the skewed vision of frontier peoples which was still widely spread among the intelligentsia in those days. It also expresses all the ambivalence of Ren Naiqiang's views which constantly negotiate between modern and progressive ideas and ways, and more traditional, almost Confucian, postures and attitudes. Ren Naiqiang himself, however, noted, since the very beginning of his research, that the content and form of the *Gesar Epics* had no relations with the Chinese classics. It is also interesting to note here that in Ren Xinjian's commemorative research article, "Man san guo" has been changed into "Zang san guo" 藏三國 (*Tibetan Romance of the Three Kingdom*); see Ren Xinjian, 2011.

29 For Ren Naiqiang's major works, see Ren Naiqiang, 1990, 2000, 2009, 2010. For Chinese scholarship on Ren Naiqiang's research work, see, for example, Ren Xinjian and Zhou Yuan (eds.), 2011.

30 Blo gros and Ren Naiqiang had three children: Rgya nag rdo rje (1932-1933), Ren Xinjian 任新建 (Tib. Tshe dbang rdo rje, b. 1937, scholar in Tibetan studies at the CASS in Chengdu) and Ren Xinya 任新雅 (b. 1941). Ren Naiqiang was already father to four children from his first wife: Ren Yi 任壹 (b. 1926, daughter), Ren Xinlu 任新鈩 (son), Ren Xinyong 任新勇 (son, killed during service in an ambush in Li

青儀志, was a traditional Han woman with little bound feet, who originally came from Ren Naiqiang's native village in Sichuan. The two had been bound to marry before they were even born, as was customary in certain Chinese families. "Honest" (Ch. *zhonghou* 忠厚) and "straight" (Ch. *ganzhi* 贛直): these are the two adjectives with which Ren Naiqiang describes his Chinese wife in "Mourning Blo gros chos mtsho" (Ch. *Dao Luozhe Qingcuo-Blo gros chos mtsho* 悼羅哲情錯, 1949). They are in fact the only two pieces of information we are given about her: a conciseness which is in sharp contrast with the profusion of details that Ren Naiqiang gives about his "Tibetan wife" (Ch. *fanfu* 蕃婦).[31]

Fig. 2 — First wife Qing Yizhi (middle-front), Blo gros chos mtsho's daughter Ren Xinya (front, second-right), husband Ren Naiqiang (front, first right), and eldest daughter Ren Yi (first-left) - 1954 ca.? Private collection - Courtesy of Ren family member

county, Rnga ba Prefecture, in 1953), Ren Xinyu 任新喻 (daughter, perished in the line of duty in 1969). I am very grateful to Ren Xinjian and Ren Yi for sharing with me information, memories and materials about their family in general, and Blo gros in particular (see my interviews, Chengdu, Oct. 2014 and Oct. 2015).

31 At the beginning of the essay "Mourning Blo gros chos mtsho" (Ch. *Dao Luozhe Qingcuo*, Ren Naiqiang, 1949), Ren Naiqiang enumerates the specificities of Blo gros's character, that is: independence, strength, courage, extraversion, intelligence and extreme joviality. But he also writes about her "benevolence" (Ch. *renci* 仁慈), "politeness" (Ch. *youli* 有禮), "devotion" (Ch. *ningfu* 佞佛), "calm" (Ch. *congrong* 從容), "humility" (Ch. *qianxun* 謙遜), "composure" (Ch. *dianze* 典則), "respect towards worthy persons and the elderly" (Ch. *zunqin shangxian jinglao* 尊親尚賢敬老), and "caring love towards children" (Ch. *ciyou* 慈幼); a *mélange* of traditional Confucian virtues and more modern, almost feminist, qualities that celebrate her radiant beauty, her exuberant energy, her "consummately Tibetan temperament" (Ch. *Qi xingge, zuyi daibiao zhengge zhi fanzu* 其性格，足以代表整個之蕃族; see Ren Naiqiang, 1949, p. 22). Ren Naiqiang's incorporeal aesthetic in describing Blo gros's healthy days is in sharp contrast with Blo gros's realistic and corporeal description of her suffering body in her later days, which will be analyzed later in this article.

Fig. 3 — Blo gros chos mtsho (middle) with Ren Naiqiang and First wife's four children and two cousins: baby girl Ren Xinyu (front-left), Ren Xinyong (middle-left), cousin (tallest-left), Ren Xinlu (smaller-right), Ren Yi (middle-right), cousin (taller-right)
Chengdu, 1936 - Private collection - Courtesy of Ren family member

Blo gros was based in Chengdu for around six years, tirelessly learning the Chinese language and Han manners and assisting her husband in his research. The couple very often moved and periodically stayed in other places in Sichuan and Xikang (Chengdu, Chongqing, Jiang'an, Dar rtse mdo, etc.), according to the needs of Ren Naiqiang's work. The other members of the family mostly remained in the Chengdu official residence. Blo gros chos mtsho somehow became the "Khampa prototype" of her husband's studies, especially at the beginning of their marriage, as one can see in the chapter "My Tibetan Wife" (Ch. *Yu zhi fan fu* 餘之蕃婦) of the book *An Illustrated History of Xikang: Folk Customs* (Ch. *Xikang tujing: minsu pian* 西康圖經：民俗篇) where Ren Naiqiang explicitly endorses the initial ethnologically utilitarian aspect of his second marriage.[32] Such marriages were moreover quite common at that time among Han scholars and explorers working in/on Kham: marrying a Tibetan woman had become a convenient way to learn the Tibetan language and to explore Tibetan culture. In the case of the Ren family, the marriage worked out well: it gave birth to a life-long intellectually stimulating partnership and a fruitful cross-cultural cooperation. We perceive real affection, caring and much respect in Ren's long commemorative essay published one month after

[32] See "My Tibetan Wife" (Ch. *Yu zhi fan fu* 餘之蕃婦), in Ren Naiqiang [1934], 2000, p. 314-315.

Blo gros's death.[33] There are sections in this essay which shed an interesting light on their personal and professional relationship. There is a naturalness and genuineness in Ren's words which betray his emotions and a true fondness for his *fan fu* which is quite unusual for a Han scholar who, despite a certain modernity and a relative open-mindedness – was born at the end of the 19th century, received a Confucian-style education and wrote in *wenyanwen* (classical Chinese) most of his life. As Ren Naiqiang himself soberly notes at the very end of his commemorative piece:

> "I previously wrote about Blo gros's nature and character in the chapter "My Tibetan Wife" (Ch. *Yu zhi fan fu*) […] as she represented the average 'Tibetan person'. I had been married with her for two years at that time. Since then, eighteen years have already gone by, and I think now that that first piece is inadequate to thoroughly represent her. This is why I have written this new piece in her memory".[34]

4. Education and language

When Blo gros chos mtsho married Ren Naiqiang at the age of twenty, she was illiterate in both Tibetan and Chinese, and she could speak no Chinese at all when she arrived in Chengdu soon after her marriage in 1929. Her priority therefore became to study oral and written Chinese, learn the customs and the habits of the Han people, and master how to behave and to do things correctly and independently in an environment which was completely alien to her. Becoming literate was the first step towards self-affirmation and emancipation, freedom and agency; it was the turning point of Blo gros's personal journey. Studying became an obsession: she practiced every day, several hours a day, with a tutor or at the primary school, with children, even after becoming fluent in Chinese, until the very end of her life.[35] On her deathbed she writes: "Even if my spirit still acutely wishes to go on learning, my

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[33] See Ren Naiqiang, 1949.

[34] See Ren Naiqiang, 1949, p. 23-24.

[35] An example suffices here to illustrate Blo gros's determination and thirst for literacy: in 1934 the couple moved to Jiang'an county for a short period, but Blo gros's personal tutor could not travel with them on that occasion. Blo gros then decided to attend, for one semester, the same primary school as Ren Yi, Ren Naiqiang's eldest daughter who often followed the couple during work transfers. Both "girls" attended Jiang'an Girls' College Elementary School (Ch. *Jiang'an nüzi zhongxue fuxiao* 江安女子中學附小), Ren Yi as a 2nd year pupil, Blo gros as a 4th year student. Ren Yi was eight years old ca., Blo gros was twenty-three ca. (See my interview with Ren Yi, Chengdu, Oct. 2015).

body doesn't allow me to do so. I hate it so much".[36]

Very early in her childhood, Blo gros understood the power of education as the most powerful equalizer, from the point of view of both cultural and gender identity. An anecdote about her childhood memories is very significant in this regard. It tells of Chinese government's officers seen through the eyes of a little Khampa girl, the ambiguous feelings their presence caused in her child mind, and Blo gros's early determination to learn the Chinese language. In "My Proposal to the National Assembly" (Ch. *Wo zai Guomin dahui de ti'an*), Blo gros recalls the day that some "Han officer" (Ch. *Han guan* 漢官) arrived in her village riding a towering horse.[37] The officer was accompanied by interpreters and his presence provoked great agitation among the villagers: everybody was busy welcoming them and preparing for their arrival. "The atmosphere had suddenly changed in the village" – she notes – "dogs were jumping up and down and chicken were flying everywhere, as if a plague was spreading all around".[38] Blo gros remembers the population offering gifts to the officers, money to the interpreters and food to everybody. Then the Han left without a single word of gratitude, and when "we [the children] asked mother 'what did they come for?', mother answered: 'They came to claim the money they are owed. […] We don't know what they do with our money, or where they go with it; they don't help us, but they come and beg for money and food. […] We must have accumulated debts from previous lives".[39]

Blo gros then explains that because the Han officers – the tax collectors – visited them "to beg for money", the Upper Nyarong population used to call them the "grand beggars" (Tib. *rgya sprang po*), playing on the double meaning of the word "rgya" (Chinese, but also large, vast and, by extension, grand) in Kham dialect.[40] She writes:

> "Although our Kham people used to call Han officers the "grand beggars", in my childish heart, I did not despise them, I was secretly envious of them. One day I asked mother: "'[Mom], can I become a Han officer?' Mother answered: 'Pray and practice Buddhism a lot, and in your next life you might well become one.' But I was not satisfied with that answer. I thought: 'If people who study Buddhism a lot can become Buddha in one lifetime, then if I study hard, why wouldn't I be able to become a Han officer?' That day, I decided that one day I would go to the land of the Han to

[36] See Luozhe Qingcuo, 1949a, p. 17.
[37] See Luozhe Qingcuo, 1948, p. 2.
[38] See Luozhe Qingcuo, 1948, p. 2.
[39] See Luozhe Qingcuo, 1948, p. 2-3.
[40] See Luozhe Qingcuo, 1948, p. 3.

study Chinese and become a Han officer".[41]

These few lines of childhood memories efficiently show the embryonic roots of Blo gros's determination to better acquaint herself with the Han-Other, starting by understanding the Chinese language. This determination began with the very elementary intuition that strong Sino-Tibetan power-relations characterized Nyarong society, that she too wished to obtain a position of power as an adult (at least the power to collect taxes), and that she too could do the job the Chinese were doing. In fact she could do it even better, since she would be able to fluently communicate with the local population in their mother language and, at the same time, with the Han side in Chinese. Blo gros's juvenile determination would become, in later days, a constant practice of appropriation, that is of taking over those aspects of Han culture – language, forms of writing, even arguments – that could be of use to her to articulate her own distinctive political, social and cultural views and projects. Learning Chinese, playing an active intercultural role, and bridging the gap between the Khampa and Han worlds became Blo gros's primary political and cultural commitment.

5. Political concerns, views, activities and projects

Blo gros chos mtsho was extremely concerned by the worsening of the Sino-Khampa confrontation during the first half of the 20th century; the conflicts, violence and loss she directly experienced through her family's history greatly contributed to the development of her interest in politics. She was determined to play a significant proactive role in helping solving the political and social issues that afflicted her native land, and she struggled for twenty years to obtain a full-fledged official position in Kham, that is in the Xikang provincial government administered by Liu Wenhui. Liu Wenhui however merely conferred on her a string of titles (Constitutional supervisor for the Nationalist government, Executive Officer of the Xikang Province Woman Association, etc.) which in fact corresponded to no real active positions: Blo gros chos mtsho's repeated offers to assist as a cultural and political mediator went completely ignored.[42] She finally managed to attend the first session of the National Assembly, established under the framework of the 1947 Constitution of the ROC and called to assembly in

[41] See Luozhe Qingcuo, 1948, p. 3.

[42] We know from Ren Naiqiang's commemorative essay that Blo gros was very disappointed about Liu Wenhui's indifference and disregard; she actually "hated" Liu Wenhui, but she was convinced that the "saving-Kham" cause was more important than any other personal feelings; see Ren Naiqiang, 1949, p. 17.

Nanjing in 1948. As one of the fifty-two national representatives of Xikang province, Blo gros chos mtsho represented Dpal yul, her birthplace.[43]

Blo gros took her role as a national representative very seriously and wrote a proposal to be submitted and discussed at the National Assembly.[44] In it she detailed the problematic situation in Kham, the reasons behind it, and the urgency to do something before the problems became unsolvable, and her worries about the possible imminent "death" of Kham. In her view, the main issue in the Kham-China relationships was the behavior of Han officers posted in Kham, their deep ignorance of anything Khampa, their lack of sympathy and understanding towards the local population and culture, and their total lack of interest in their work as officers there. The local population had no contact with them, and the cultural and linguistic gap did not favour a better cohabitation. Blo gros's words clearly point to an issue of coercive power, a lack of legitimacy, and inappropriate agency since, as she writes, power in Kham should be mainly exerted by bilingual and bicultural Kham people. She explains:

> "Since I came to Sichuan in 1929, I have started learning oral and written Chinese and everything one needs to know when living in the territory of the Han people. I have got used to local customs and habits, and I can now happily live in Han territory. By contrast, how do Han officers who govern our Kham people live in Kham territory? They cling to the golden rule of 'using Chinese to transform the barbarians' (Ch. *yong xia bian yi* 用夏變夷) as soon as they are appointed officers in frontier regions; they live in Chinese-style palaces built by Han people; they eat rice and vegetables

[43] Blo gros chos mtsho was the only Tibetan woman who officially attended the National Assembly as a representative of a Xikang principality. Wu Xianglan 吳香蘭 (Tib. Ye shes rnam sgron) who also attended the National Assembly, was the "proto-official" representative of the kingdom of Muli 木里 (Muli was not officially recognized as an established administrative unit by the ROC as the ROC never managed to control it; Muli was *de jure* annexed to Yanyuan county (Ch. *Yanyuan xian* 鹽源縣), so it was formally represented at the National Assembly by the Yanyuan representative, backed by Wu Xianglan). Wu Xianglan, from Litang, was the cousin of Ngag dbang Bsam gtan chos 'phel (Ch. Xiang Songdian Chunpin 項松點春品, 1927-1961), the 18th and penultimate king of Muli who originally was from Litang, married Tshe ring (Ch. Cili 次裡), a member of the 'Bar family, the Muli ruling clan, and held office from 1944 to 1949. Wu Xianglan fled to Taiwan after the Maoist takeover of China in 1949 and had a political career there.

[44] Blo gros's proposal, "Proposal for the Adoption of Legal Requirements to Stipulate Borderland Populations' Participation in Politics, as well as their Rights and Interests" (Ch. *Yi falü guiding bianmin canzheng zhengquan yi'an* 以法律規定邊民參政政權益案), is detailed in Luozhe Qingcuo, 1948, p. 5-8 (see also Ren Naiqiang, 1949, p. 17).

> sent to them from inner China; they wear traditional Chinese long robes or trendy Sun Yat-sen-style suits (Ch. *zhongshanfu* 中山服); everything, absolutely everything they use, has to be brought into Kham from inner China: lanterns, vegetable oil, salt, pickles, vinegar, soy sauce, as well as door inscriptions, candles, artillery and 'toilet paper to wipe one's butt' (Ch. *kai pigu de caozhi* 揩屁股的草紙). They, of course, can speak and write only Chinese, they read Chinese books, they publish Chinese-language notifications, they apply Chinese law, they exert Chinese-style coerciveness, they implement the Chinese educational system to build a Chinese land [in Kham]".[45]

And again about power, legitimacy and agency:

> "These [Han officers in Kham] are only able to perfunctorily carry out orders and cheat their superiors, but they are totally useless to provoke any political impulse in the field. Since the people are the very object of politics, if one doesn't understand the feelings of the people and their conditions, one cannot pursue politics. In Kham, 99% of Khampa don't understand the Chinese language, Han residents make up only 1%, so those officers exert their rule on only 1% of the population, the Han, but they have no relationships at all with 99% of the remaining population, the locals. All my family, starting from my grandparents, to my parents, down to the present day [generation], has already experienced three or four generations of Han officers' governance, yet no one has understood what those officers have been doing so far".[46]

Blo gros chos mtsho never questions the legitimacy of the Chinese presence in Kham and the ROC's integrationist policy there. She does however challenge the way measures are implemented in border regions like Kham and she criticizes the lack of practical collaboration between the Han and the local population, the insufficiency of consultation and discussion between the two sides, and, above all, the incompetence of Han officers on the field, their coerciveness, arrogance and disdain. She proposes a common-sense solution which, in her view, should have been urgently implemented by law. It consisted of disposing of all unprofessional and non-acculturated officers as well as of "ignorant and abusive interpreters" who, she explains, create problems with both the population and the officers because of their highly insufficient linguistic knowledge. She suggests instead to offer official posts only to bilingual and bicultural people who are efficient, capable, open-minded and dynamic. Local people, she explains, should be

[45] See Luozhe Qingcuo, 1948, p. 2.
[46] See Luozhe Qingcuo, 1948, p. 2.

given priority since they have first-hand knowledge of the real situation in the field and a deep understanding of local needs.

Blo gros's *Proposal*, however – which, before being submitted to the National Assembly, had already been countersigned by a great number of colleagues and accepted by the Review Committee – was in the end not discussed at the National Assembly. The official reason was 'shortage of time': the National Assembly was busy discussing several other thornier issues. Blo gros chos mtsho was very disappointed about this, but she did not resign. Once back in Sichuan, she opened a legal file, appealed to the Court and pursued legal action to have her proposal taken into consideration and implemented, "[…] but nothing changed", she writes.[47] By this point the year was 1948. The Maoist takeover was imminent, the National Assembly had elected Chiang Kai-shek as the first constitutional President of the ROC, giving him emergency powers "to avert imminent danger to the security of the State or of the people", without legislative restriction. As a matter of fact, the situation was extremely critical for the Chinese Nationalist government, and everything was soon to change, in both China and Tibet.

From the description of her experience at the National Assembly, two pervasive features of Blo gros chos mtsho's views and writings emerge. Firstly, her ambivalence, not as chaotic or contradictory ideas or feelings about something or someone, but as the importance, in her view, of being 'ambi-valent', 'two-powered', a way of approaching and solving problems by accepting the positive and rejecting the negative from any two opposite sides. Secondly, the analogical connections she often makes between body and place. Throughout Blo zhos's essays, there are striking correspondences and analogies between 'writing the body' and 'writing place', and, in particular, between writing her own body and her own *pha yul* or "fatherland".

6. The body, the nation, the self

The idea that bodies and bodily characteristics are heavily freighted with values and features that are often linked to political, social and cultural spheres is not new. 'Body politic' is actually an ancient metaphor from the *Rigveda* (Skt. *Ṛgveda*) of ancient India and the Greek and Latin classics (Aesop's *The Belly and the Members* is an outstanding example), through medieval literature (considering the church as the body of Christ) and modern philosophy (Thomas Hobbes' association

[47] See Luozhe Qingcuo, 1948, p. 5.

of bodily afflictions and political diseases in the *Leviathan*), to post-colonial discourses viewing the body as a site of representation and control (Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant, etc.); the examples of tropes likening a *corpus*, 'body', to a *corporatio*, 'corporation', abound.[48] Regarding China, there is a general consensus in Chinese studies scholarship that there is little exposure of the body in pre-modern Chinese culture; the body is evoked, and its appearance in literature and culture is a relatively new phenomenon, connected to modernity, anatomy, phenomenology, materiality, realism and a new corporeal aesthetics. The rhetoric of the healthy body as a metaphor of national health became widespread in the nationalistic ROC period, and the newly built nation was depicted as a living body that can be healthy or sick, can rejuvenate or wither, and can eventually die.[49] In Tibetan culture and literature, corporeal representations express something 'substantial': *rus ba*, meaning 'bone' or 'bone-substance', is the metonym for the ancient clan system of Tibet, and represents the very essence of a family lineage, thus referring to individual, clanic and community identities. Similarly, on a larger scale, the widely-known image of the Srin mo demoness lying on her back, stands for Lhasa in particular, and Tibet as a whole, and recalls one of the most ancient Tibetan myths linking female corporeality to national issues.[50]

In the case of Blo gros chos mtsho's writings, however, the simile among bodily, national and identity considerations is more than just a literary trope. Blo gros chos mtsho fell seriously ill soon after she first entered the "Land of the Han" and arrived in Chengdu after her marriage. She was never to recover, and her autobiographical essays are largely punctuated by simple, realistic, extremely genuine and direct descriptions of the gradual but inexorable deterioration of her ill and suffering body, her thirst for life despite everything, her determination to live, and, in parallel, the serious weakening of her decaying homeland, torn between internecine wars and resistance campaigns. As Blo gros chos mtsho writes, it was urgent to do something before the problems in Kham became unsolvable, it was urgent "to heal the dying

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48 "Corporation" is used here in the etymological sense of an association of persons united for some purpose, hence a society, an institution, a church, a state, a nation. Scholarship on body politic is very rich, see, for example: de Baecque, 1993; A. D. Harvey, 2007; K. Olwig, 2002.

49 For relevant secondary references dealing with the body in Chinese culture and literature, see David L. Eng, Ruskola Teemu and Shuang Shen, 2012a and 2012b; L. Heinrich and F. Martin (eds.), 2006; A. L. Heinrich, 2016; A. Zito and T Barlow (eds.), 1994.

50 According to Tibetan tradition, the Srin mo, a pre-Buddhist demoness, ferociously resisted the spreading of Buddhism in Tibet. She was thus subjugated by being pinned down to the soil, on her back, by means of "monastic nails", each "nail" corresponding to one of the main monasteries of the newly Buddhisied Tibet.

body" of the Kham region before it died. Analogies between writing the body and writing place are pervasive in her essays, notably in terms of weakening, serious disease, agony and imminent death. The use of medical terminology is pervasive too; a few examples suffice here. In the opening paragraph of "My Homeland" (Ch. *Wo de Jiaxiang*), Blo gros chos mtsho, from her deathbed, recalls her homeland, her childhood and, in general, her personal journey. She regrets having "abandoned" her Nyarong "fatherland" (Tib. *pha yul*) during the twenty years she travelled far and wide across diverse Kham principalities, engaged in fieldwork with her husband, rarely going back to the land she felt so emotionally connected to. She writes:

> "During these twenty years of study, I didn't have the time to feel nostalgic for my homeland, yet villagers travelling from there often told me that my house was already damaged and that the village had already changed; my heart was torn apart. […] Now I am here, with no hope, and I miss my homeland so much. I am severely ill, but what about him [my fatherland]? I know it all too well, he is much more seriously ill than me".[51]

In "My proposal to the national assembly" (Ch. *Wo zai guomin dahui de ti'an*), Blo gros extensively writes about the "political disease" (Ch. *zhengzhi bing* 政治病) from which all Chinese frontier regions, Xikang province in particular, suffered in that moment of their history. She notes:

> "The political disease from which Xikang is currently suffering is exactly the same political disease that has already affected Mongolia (Ch. *Menggu* 蒙古), Xinjiang and Dbus-Gtsang (Ch. *Xizang* 西藏) in past years. Several border nationalities are now afflicted from the same political disease that earlier wrecked present-day Outer Mongolia (Ch. *Wai Meng* 外蒙) and Dbus-Gtsang to the point that they died of it. [*corrupted ten-character sentence about Xinjiang*] Xikang is fundamentally and integrally bound to Dbus-Gtsang, but we, the Khampa, we don't want to follow Central Tibet to its death (Ch. *que bu yuan suizhe Xizang siqu* 卻不願隨著西藏死去). In this moment of agony, I still hope that the nationalities of all border regions will be reborn (Ch. *fusheng* 復生), recover (Ch. *jiankang* 健康) and become co-nationals within one single body, the Republic of China. But will the medicines used by the doctors be

[51] See Luozhe Qingcuo, 1949a, p. 17.

> efficacious to treat our symptoms?"[52]

Then she adds:

> "The Central [Chinese] government is the hospital, locally appointed officers are the doctors, but the program to rule border regions is just a tonic. If one wants drugs to effectively treat one's symptoms, one first needs to carry out a full check-up and establish a careful diagnosis of the situation. […] I have some medical knowledge since I have been ill for a long time now, and I dare to say that this is the crux of the issue: finding an effective [treatment] program".[53]

In the first paragraphs, Blo gros equates "disease" with "separatism", "death" with "separation", thus confirming her attachment to the construction of a united and peaceful political environment, which includes Kham and all the other border regions (the healthy body), under the guidance of the ROC. Blo gros's voice is however more critical in the second paragraph: her point here is that the measures (i.e. the treatments) implemented by Chinese government officers are anything but efficient; their diagnoses of the situation are not accurate enough and the remedies they implement are more harmful than beneficial. Consequently, the treatment she proposes is a radical change of local governance in Kham conferring – as explained before – more power and agency to bilingual and bicultural Kham people.

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[52] See Luozhe Qingcuo, 1948, p. 4. Blo gros does not precisely describe the events in Mongolia, Xinjiang and Central Tibet which she evokes in her essay. The geopolitical chessboard concerning those regions was extremely complex and highly conflictual in the first half of the 20th century; issues of national boundaries, independence claims and resistance movements proliferated, they involved multiple actors, China, Russia and the UK, among others. As far as Mongolia is concerned, following the iterated declarations of independence after the fall of the Qing dynasty, and the Chinese and Russians attempts to (re)affirm their control on the region, the Russia-supported Mongolian resistance movement to Chinese annexionism ended in the foundation of the People's Republic of Mongolia in 1924. As for Xinjiang, the situation was all the more explosive: after more than a century of Manchu governance (1877), and before being integrated into the PRC in 1949, the Kumul Rebellion established the First East Turkestan Republic in 1933, and the Ili Rebellion led to the Second East Turkestan Republic in 1944. As far as Central Tibet is concerned, a series of events deeply destabilized its political configuration during the first half of the 20th century, threatening its *de facto* autonomy and ultimate independence: the British invasion of Tibet in 1904, the following Tibet-related bilateral conventions and treaties the British signed with China and Russia; the entering of Chinese troops into Tibet in 1908, the 13th Dalai Lama's fleeing to India and Proclamation of Independence in 1913, the 9th Panchen Lama's fleeing to Inner Mongolia in 1924 and his multiple activities in China, etc. They led to the closing of the Central Tibet and, eventually, to its final incorporation into the PRC.

[53] See Luozhe Qingcuo, 1948, p. 4.

The analogy between Blo gros chos mtsho's diseased body and the declining Khampa political and cultural environment is even more effective in Ren Naiqiang's long posthumous biographical essay commemorating his Khampa wife. Written in classical Chinese (Ch. *Wenyan* 文言), his style is concise and graphic, detailed and realistic, almost surgical, in dissecting every single aspect of a human/national bodily deterioration: the appearance of the illness, its evolution, every single symptom, the physical pain, the final agony, the tapeworm eating Blo gros's body from the inside, sucking her blood, her energy and vigour, her resistance and tenacity, her thirst for life, and her final, ineluctable end.[54] There is nothing tearful or pathetic in Ren Naiqiang's description, the lapidary-like precision of his words is extremely effective yet never voyeuristic: a string of three/four-character classical Chinese sentences interspersed with full-stops to describe the stiffness of her limbs, her swollen tongue, her sparkling eyes, her last three words (Xinya, the name of her daughter; Xinjian, her son, and Xiaozhuang, her husband), her hushed voice, the children playing around her deathbed.[55] Unlike Blo gros chos mtsho, Ren Naiqiang never explicitly discloses the human/national body trope, he never directly associates his wife's dying body with the situation in Kham, but the implicit analogy is clearly implied by the lines of the description. Blo gros chos mtsho died from illness in August 1949, she was buried in Chengdu, in a "foreign land" (Ch. *yixiang* 異鄉, in opposition to the *jiaxiang* 家鄉 of Blo gros's essay *Wo de jiaxiang*, "My Homeland"), her body facing her fatherland of Upper Nyarong.[56] The People's Republic of China (PRC) was created only a few days after her passing, and Upper Nyarong, the Kham region of Eastern Tibet, as well as the rest of greater Tibet, were soon to be definitively and effectively incorporated into the new Maoist political body.

7. Intellectual and editorial activities

In 1946, a group of scholars-cum-cultural actors which included Ren Naiqiang, Paul Sherap (1887-1966), Liu Liqian 劉立千 (1910-2008) and Blo gros chos mtsho, co-founded in Chengdu the Kham-Tibet Research

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[54] Blo gros chos mtsho never names her disease in her essays; it is Ren Naiqiang who acquaints the reader with its true nature, naming and describing it, but also enumerating all the countless treatments Blo gros ineffectively tried.

[55] Ren Naiqiang's style combining a classical three-/four-character Chinese language structure with detailed realism gives a very refreshing result of literary modernity in Chinese.

[56] See Ren Naiqiang, 1949, p. 24.

Society (Ch. *Kang Zang yanjiu she* 康藏研究社) and launched the *Kham-Tibet Studies Monthly* (Ch. *Kang Zang yanjiu yuekan* 康藏研究月刊), an independent, privately sponsored academic journal of which Blo gros chos mtsho was appointed executive editor.[57] The *Monthly* was not sponsored by the government or other state institutions; economic independence was one of the principal points of its ethical and scholarly charter, a precondition for the founders to be able to work independently of political interferences, at least in principle. As its title suggests, the thematic orientation of the *Monthly* was Tibetan studies. Publications included Liu Liqian's complete Chinese translation of the *Mar pa'i rnam thar* (Ch. *Maba yishi zhuan* 瑪巴譯師傳); Li Zhesheng's 李哲生 Chinese translation of "Notes sur les marches tibétaines du Sseutch'ouan et du Yun-nan" (Ch. *Chuan Dian zhi Zang bian* 川滇之藏邊) by the French missionary Francis Goré; Peng Gonghou's 彭公侯 Chinese translation of the Ladakhi version of the Gesar Epics (Ch. *'Man San Guo' benshi* 『蠻三國』本事) translated into English by A. H. Francke; Paul Sherap's serial publications on Mon yul and the Mon ba in Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Ladakh; Ren Naiqiang's numerous scholarly works such as the "Genealogy of the Indigenous Leader of Sde dge" (Ch. *Dege tusi shipu* 德格土司世譜), his pedagogical notes, for instance a piece explaining the Tibetan transliteration romanisation system used in the *Monthly* (Ch. *Benkan caiyong zangwen zhi daiyongzi shuoming* 本刊採用藏文之代用字說明), and his more political articles such as "The Tibet Issue: History and Current Situation" (Ch. Xizang wenti

[57] The *Kham-Tibet Studies Monthly* (Ch. *Kang Zang yanjiu yuekan*) was published from Oct. 30, 1946 to Sept. 30, 1949; 29 issues in all. Ren Naiqiang, Paul Sherap and Liu Liqian were all researchers in Tibetan Studies at West China University Frontier Region Research Center (Ch. *Huaxi daxue bianjiang yanjiusuo* 華西大學邊疆研究所) in Chengdu when they founded the *Monthly*. Paul Sherap (1887-1966, Tib. Rdo rje spyod pa, Ch. Xie Guo'an) was a Khampa polymath and polyglot intellectual from Dar rtse mdo who firstly studied in Drepung monastery in Lhasa as a young monk. He then moved to India where he became a Christian and was given the name of Paul Sherap. Back to Kham, in the 1930s he worked as a Tibetan language teacher at the Kangding Normal College, and in 1944 he integrated the Huaxi University Frontier Region Research Center in Chengdu where Ren Naiqiang also worked. For Paul Sherap's adventurous life before his return to Kham in the late 1920s, see Paul Sherap, G. A. Combe, 1926. As for Liu Liqian (1910-2008), he too integrated the Frontier Research Center in 1944. A Buddhist himself, he started to become interested in Tibetan Buddhism as a young man while working in a bank in Chongqing. He then learned Tibetan language in Dar rtse mdo following Paul Sherap and other religious masters' teachings (and marrying Paul Sherap's daughter at the same occasion). He specialized in the translation of Buddhist texts and worked as the official translator and interpreter for several Tibetan masters.

licheng yu xiankuang 西藏問題歷程與現況).[58]

Within the *Monthly* editorial team, Blo gros was much more than a simple collaborator, she was absolutely instrumental in creating and running the *Monthly*, in having it regularly sponsored, properly and cheaply printed, published, and distributed to relevant institutions and private circles. She also represented the publication at many social and business events. She played a determining public relations role since she was in charge of all the contacts with the wealthy and influential personalities who sponsored the journal, both Han and Tibetans. Among the regular sponsors one finds, for example, the Shanghainese photographer and explorer Zhuang Xueben 莊學本 (1909-1984) who was a friend of the Ren family, as well as the "strongman of Sde dge", Bya rgod stobs ldan (1898-1960), who wrested power away from the Sde dge royal family and became the authority there in the early 20th century.[59] Blo gros solicited donations by organizing and participating in several types of events and social activities, and she also helped correct the drafts and herself contributed two essays to the *Monthly*. When illness forced Blo gros to stay in bed, the *Monthly* was not issued regularly, as it appears, for example, from a "note of apology" published

[58] For the Chinese translation of the *Mar pa lo tsa ba'i rnam thar* (Ch. Maba yishi zhuan 瑪巴譯師傳), see Liu Liqian, 1946-1948; for the eleven-installment Chinese translation of Francis Goré's "Notes sur les marches tibétaines du Sseu-tch'ouan et du Yun-nan" (Ch. *Chuan Dian zhi Zang bian* 川滇之藏邊) from the Dec. 1947 issue to the Aug. 1949 issue, see Zhao Aidong, Shi Shuo, Yao Leye, 2011 (for the original piece, see F. Goré, 1923); for the Chinese translation of A. H. Francke's Gesar epics Anglophone version, see Peng Gonghou (tr.), 1947-1948 (for the original piece, see A. H. Francke, 2000); for Paul Sherap's series on Mon yul, see Xie Guo'an, 1947a, 1947b, 1947c, 1947d, 1947e, 1947f, 1948; for Ren Naiqiang's quoted articles, see Ren Naiqiang, 1947-1948, Ren Naiqiang, 1947 and Ren Naiqiang, 1948.

[59] Zhuang Xueben 莊學本 (1909-1984), the "father" of visual anthropology in China, was very active in Eastern Tibet, in Kham in particular, in the 1930s (he was based in Dar rtse mdo for about ten years). Zhuang's pictures of "China's West" were the first pictures of Eastern Tibet published in Chinese popular, fashionable, urban magazines such as the Shanghai-based *Liangyou Pictorial* (Ch. *Lingyou huabao* 良友畫報; special issue on Xikang, 1940), *Zhonghua Pictorial* (Ch. *Zhonghua huabao* 中華畫報) and *Shanghai News* (Ch. *Shenbao* 申報). As for Bya rgod stobs ldan (1898-1960), he played a prominent role in the history of Eastern Tibet in the first half of the 20th c. by making opportunist alliances with many different actors, in Kham, Central Tibet and Nationalist China [see Yudru Tsomu, 2016 (unpublished)]. Zhuang Xueben and Bya rgod stobs ldan's names are mentioned in the "expense reports" and "sponsorship thanking notes" which were regularly published in the *Monthly*. The notes list all the names of the *Monthly* private sponsors and the amount of their donations (mostly 10,000 yuan, sometimes much more), and show the network woven around the Kham-Tibet Research Society, its configuration, extension, orientation and the spheres of influence. One can also see that Han donors largely outnumbered Tibetan donors, the majority of them being businessmen from Sichuan, but also from Shanghai, and a few scholars and intellectuals.

three months before her passing (issue No. 26, 1949). And when Blo gros died in August 1949, the *Monthly* permanently ceased its activity, the September issue being the last issue. Her role and presence there were thus indispensable.[60]

In the *Monthly* editorial venture, Blo gros chos mtsho was the only woman, she operated entirely in a men's world. The Tibetan regions of Khams, Amdo and Dbus-gtsang had no Tibetan-language Tibetan-founded modern journals in those days, so the issue of the place of women in the press and the editorial industry does not apply there.[61] But even in China where a modern periodical press already existed, the place of women in the industry was still in its infancy. This was all the truer in the regions of Western China, despite the democratic movement of May 4th 1919, the rise of feminist ideas and the publication of women's magazines, created at least at the beginning mainly by male editors.[62] In Chengdu, the first periodical for women and by women was founded in 1912 (24 issues in all).[63] The journal was called *Women's World* (Ch. *Nü jie* 女界); it had strong feminist undertones and often published contributions of the well-known poetess Zeng Lan 曾蘭 whose essays declaimed the condition of women. By the time Blo gros chos mtsho was in Chengdu, other women's journals had been created, but I have no evidence at the moment to determine if she ever

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60 The very critical political context of the imminent end of the ROC and the subsequent foundation of the PRC (Oct. 1, 1949) might also have contributed to the decision of stopping the publication of the *Monthly*, but, according to my information, it was not the main reason, the main reason being Blo gros's death.

61 Two journals in the Tibetan language were created at the beginning of the 20th century on the Indian side of the Himalaya, outside any interference from the Chinese political and cultural worlds: *The Ladakh Journal* (Tib. *La dwags kyi ag bar*), edited in Leh between 1903/1904 and 1908 by A. H. Francke's Moravian mission; and the *Mirror of Tibet* (Tib. *Gsar 'gyur me long*) published in Kalimpong between 1925 and 1962 by the missionary Gergan Dorje Tarchin. In Lhasa, between 1907 and 1911, the Qing dynasty Amban Lian Yu launched *News in Colloquial Tibetan* (Tib./Ch. *Bod yig phal skad gsar 'gyur/Xizang baihua bao* 西藏白話報), a Sino-Tibetan bilingual publication aiming at "spreading modern and secular culture in Tibet and abolishing superstition" (see Xu Lihua, 2003, p. 44). At this stage of my research, I possess no evidence showing that women agency and women-related issues played any determinant role in these Tibetophone publications (which anyway had not been launched on Tibetans' initiative). I also possess no evidence suggesting that Blo gros knew about those journals, but it is very possible since Paul Sherap, who lived in India, knew about the *Mirror of Tibet* and possibly read it.

62 Women-related periodical publications mainly appeared at first in the coastal regions of Eastern China (Shanghai, Nanjing, Beijing, Canton), and only later in Chongqing and Chengdu. The first women's journal in China, the *Women's Study Journal* (Ch. *Nüxue bao* 女學報), was published in Shanghai in 1898 (for more details, see for example J. Nivard, 1986, p. 174-175, endnote 1).

63 See Wang Lüping, 2011, p. 43.

read those publications. Questions abound: did she know about them? Had she heard of publications from elsewhere in which women and women's issues played a determinant role? To what extent did she know about feminist ideas and the emerging role of women in China and, more generally, the international modern urban societies? Was she inspired by any particular model in her professional life and in the consolidation of her natural thirst for independence, empowerment and emancipation?

Blo gros does not explicitly write about feminism or women's issues in her essays. She never uses these words and the thematic orientation of the journal she co-founded did not deal with this kind of question. However one can safely say that, at least to a certain extent, she was aware of women-related debates in modern Chinese culture and in the world, and she certainly supported feminist ideas about female empowerment, independence and emancipation. I have already pointed out in this article that Blo gros herself came from a family where strongwomen and female power were a reality and in some sense, a tradition. Moreover, after marriage, Blo gros frequented a modern and progressive intellectual environment where issues of female agency in the modern world were likely to have been debated. Her husband, Ren Naiqiang, was her first unconditional supporter. He encouraged all her undertakings and was a tenacious defender of the necessity of promoting female education and entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, the Rens' intellectual circle also included Westerners, Protestant missionaries in particular, who, in the first half of the 20th century, were based in diverse localities across Kham spreading the Christian religion, but also opening hospitals and schools. Their views and efficiency in achieving cultural and educational projects might have inspired the Rens, Blo gros chos mtsho in particular. Missionaries founded, for example, all the Western China Schools which opened in and around Kham, including the Western China University in Chengdu where Ren Naiqiang and all the editors of the *Monthly* worked as researchers in the 1940s. Paul Sherap himself converted to Christianity while in India and was well informed about Western missionary work in Asia. Missionaries also contributed greatly in promoting equal opportunities to high-quality modern education for all, including women and the poor. Starting from the end of the 19th century, female missionaries in particular helped spread modern ideas and practices about women's education, agency, and representation in Chinese journals and publications. This began in China proper, but later took place also in the frontier regions of "Western China", that is

in Eastern Tibet, where they were very active.[64] Missionaries also had a long experience of more personal and associative fundraising initiatives that allowed them to fund privately-sponsored editorial projects such as missionary journals, the oldest example in Sichuan being *The West China Missionary News* (Ch. *Huaxi jiaohui xinwen* 華西教會新聞). The first editor in chief of this publication was a woman, the British Quaker missionary Mary Jane Davidson.[65]

All of these influences may thus have strengthened Blo gros chos mtsho's naturally independent temperament, her progressive views, and her determination in pursuit of her projects, including the publication of the *Monthly*.[66] She may also have been encouraged and sustained in her moments of doubt and weakness by examples of other Khampa women who, in the first half of the 20th century, emerged on the Sino-Tibetan scene thanks to their fluency in both Tibetan and Chinese and their cultural and/or political Sino-Tibetan activities. Beside Wu Xianglan 吳香蘭 (Tib. Ye shes rnam sgron) whom Blo gros met at the National Assembly in 1948, other proactive and influential women may have constituted inspiring models of independent female figures,

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64 See, for example, the Society for Promoting Female Education in the East founded by the British Missionary Miss Grant in 1834 to spread women's education in China and nearby countries [Society for Promoting Female Education in the East (ed.), 1847]. For a bibliographical review of studies on the implication of American women missionaries in the promotion of female education in China at the turn of the 19th century, see Mary Shepard Wong (2012). As far as Kham is concerned, we know that in Batang, for example, in the school launched by a very active group of American medical doctor missionaries including Albert Shelton, classes were for everybody, boys and girls, and texts and illustrations taken from *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Harper's Bazaar* were often used to compensate for the lack of schoolbooks, notably in the Tibetan language; see F. Beal Shelton, 1912, p. 94.

65 Mary Jane Davidson (1847-1918) and her husband, the Reverend Robert John Davidson, were Quaker missionaries at the Friends' Foreign Mission Association (FFMA) in Chongqing from 1890-1895. Mary was also a trained nurse and midwife. *The West China Missionary News* – which she launched in 1899 and which was stopped in 1943 – was firstly an English language monthly issued for internal distribution among the Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou and Tibetan regions' members of the FFMA. It then became a Chinese-language bulletin of Christian news freely distributed in Western China.

66 Another strong female personality was active in Kham in the first half of the 20th century: the writer-cum-traveler Alexandra David-Neel (1868-1969), the first Western woman to manage to reach Lhasa in 1924. From 1938 to 1943, she was "stuck" (*coincée*) in Dar rtse mdo because of the civil war in China, waiting for an opportunity to continue her journey toward innermost Tibet. Did Blo gros and Ren Naiqiang ever hear about her exploratory missions? Did they ever meet and exchange with her? Further research will elucidate these points. At the moment, we only know that in those years Alexandra David-Neel published a few articles in the *Journal of the West China Border Research Society* (Ch. *Huaxi bianjiang yanjiu xuehui zazhi* 華西邊疆研究學會雜誌), an Anglophone review of anthropology published in Chengdu from 1922 to 1946 by the Canadian Methodist Mission Press.

worthy of appreciation and emulation. These include: Liu Manqing 劉曼卿 (Tib. Dbyangs can, 1906-1941), the traveller, activist, and sinophone writer who was the sister-in law (and possibly also the 1st wife?) of the Ba thang ba Skal bzang tshe ring (Ch. Wang Tianhua 王天化 or Wang Tianjie 王天傑, 1905-1946), one of the leaders of the 'Kham for the Khampa' movement;[67] Feng Yunxian 馮雲仙 (Tib. Bskal bzang chos sgron), herself a journalist and a writer, she was a friend of Liu Manqing and the wife of the distinguished scholar Byams pa rnam rgyal (aka Byams brtse'i gru gzings, Ch. Yang Zhifu 楊質夫, 1907-1961);[68] Huang Yulan 黃玉蘭 (Tib. Tshe ring dbyangs 'dzoms, 1905-2001), an active teacher and cultural player, she was the wife of the nationalist politician Jiang Anxi 江安西 (Tib. Blo bzang don grub, 1906-1989), the maternal uncle of the communist revolutionary 'Ba' ba Phun tshogs dbang rgyal (1922-2014);[69] and Ye shes sgrol ma (Ch. Wang Zhe

[67] Liu Manqing 劉曼卿 (Tib. Dbyangs can, 1906-1941) was born in Lhasa to parents of uncertain ethnicity (a Tibetan mother and a Chinese father, according to F. Jagou 2009, p. 6; a Tibetan Muslim father from Lhasa and an unmentioned mother, according to D. G. Atwill, 2018, p. 183, n. 62). She grew up in Nanjing as part of the Khampa community there and attended the Nanjing Mongol-Tibetan School. Liu Manqing extensively travelled to Kham and Lhasa in the 1930s, was received twice by the 13th Dalai Lama in Lhasa and wrote several books such as the travelogue *Carriage Expedition to Kham and Tibet* (Liu Manqing, 1933) and *Borderland Education* (Liu Manqing, 1937).

[68] Feng Yunxian 馮雲仙 (Tib. Bskal bzang chos sgron), a Khampa woman of unknown date and place of birth, became an orphan as a baby and was adopted by the wellknown Lai Zhizhong (a local lordling in Ya'an, a member of the powerful Lai family, a Hakka clan originally from Guangdong who was involved in the mining business in Western Sichuan since the end of the Qing). Feng Yunxian was a friend of Liu Manqing at school in Nanjing. She then became a scholar, a social activist, a female reporter at the Central News Agency, a special commissioner in Kham for the Nationalist government, a representative at the National Congress and a member of the Mongolian and Tibetan Committee. Her writings include *Diary of My Travel Outside of the Pass in Xikang* (Feng Yunxian, 1937). Her husband, the scholar Byams pa rnam rgyal (aka Byams brtse'i gru gzings, Ch. Yang Zhifu 楊質夫, 1907-1961), was a disciple of *dge bshes* Shes rab rgya mtsho, one of the pioneering authors of *The Great Sino-Tibetan Dictionary* (Ch./Tib. *Zang Han da cidian* 藏漢大辭典 /*Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*) in the 1920s, and the Tibetan translator, in the early 1940s, of Sun Yat-sen's *Essentials of the Three Principles of the People* (Ch./Tib. *San min zhuyi yaoyi* 三民主義要義 / *San min kru'u yi'i bsdus don*; see Sun Krung hran, 1943. I thank Gray Tuttle for providing a copy of the Tibetan translation).

[69] Huang Yulan 黃玉蘭 (Tib. Tshe ring dbyangs 'dzoms; 1905-2001), from Batang, was educated in the missionary Normal College there and was fluent in Tibetan, Chinese and English. Very active in the field of education, she took an active part in the pedagogical and cultural life of the Khampa circles in Nanjing during the years she spent there with her husband Jiang Anxi 江安西 (Tib. Blo bzang don

王哲, 1925-?), an early fervent communist militant who was to become a sinophone writer in later (post-)Maoist times.[70] All of these women – in very different ways, and by nurturing views and ambitions with which Blo gros might not have fully agreed – worked for the emergence of a more progressive and modern Tibet. They played important intercultural roles and were deeply involved in working as mediators in the emergence of a new Sino-Tibetan dialogue.[71] In the literary field, they all experimented with genres, styles, and a language, Chinese, all things previously unheard of in Tibetan women's literature. They all pioneered a field of Tibetan literary production that was to become an enduring and pervasive aspect of the Tibetan political-cultural scene in the (post-)Maoist years to come, that is, Tibetan sinophone literature. In particular, they anticipated, albeit embryonically, issues of diglossia, identity, agency and displacement which were to dominate the Sino-Tibetan intellectual and literary debates/scene in the (post-)Maoist period.[72] Their precursory political and intellectual activities also

grub, 1906-1989, Bapa Phun tshogs dbang rgyal's uncle), in the late 1920s and in the 1930s. She possibly collaborated with the editors and contributors of Sino-Tibetan journals while in Nanjing [the monthly edited by Mongolo-Tibetan Commission (Ch. *Meng Zang yuebao* 蒙藏月報, 1929), *Kham Vanguard* (Ch. *Kang Zang qianfeng* 康藏前鋒, 1933), *Journal of the Mongolian-Tibetan School* (Ch. *Meng Zang xuexiao xiaokan* 蒙藏學校校刊, 1936)].

70 Ye shes sgrol ma (Ch. Yixi Zhuoma 益西卓瑪, also Wang Zhe 王哲, 1925-?), from Labrang, a professional sinophone writer since the 1950s ("Labrang Female Workers" is her first piece; see Yixi Zhuoma, 1953], was at school at Shanghai Fudan University in the early 1940s. A fervent communist and anti-Japanese activist, she was thirteen when she joined the underground communist cultural youth circles in Lanzhou (she was at school there) and, later, in Shanghai. She remained all her life a staunch communist (see my interview, Lanzhou, Oct. 6, 2002). Her father Dgon mchog tshe ring (1895-1995), an educated modern man from a rich family of Labrang and a communist since the early 1920s, introduced modern cinema in Lanzhou in 1933, opening the first cinema hall there, the New People Cinema (Ch. *Xin min dianyingyuan* 新民電影院) and personally travelling to Shanghai to buy films.

71 A thorough study on these intercultural Sino-Tibetan women, and their role in the first half of the 20th century Kham, needs to be done; I am presently working on it. Speaking about intercultural Tibetan women of that period, I am not sure, at this stage of my research, whether Blo gros ever heard of or met, in Dar rtse mdo or Chengdu, Rin chen lha mo (aka Mrs. Louis King; 1901-1929), a woman from Dar rtse mdo who married the English-national official Louis King in 1919 (the year Blos gros met Ren Naiqiang in Nyarong) after several years of love partnership in Kham. In 1926 Rin chen lha mo (with the interpretation of her husband) published a book in English about Tibetan culture and people (King Rinchen Lhamo, 1926). It is interesting to note here that since neither Louis King nor Rin chen lha mo were fluent in each other's language, they had to communicate in Chinese, the language they both were fluent in (King Rinchen Lhamo, 1926, vii).

72 Books on (post-)Maoist, or contemporary, Tibetan literature include: P. L. Grokhovskiy, 2018; L. R. Hartley and P. Schiaffini-Vedani (eds.), 2008; Lama Jabb, 2015; S. J. Venturino, 2006; and R. Virtanen, 2014. Regarding the issues of diglossia,

show that continuities – and not only ruptures – between pre-Maoist and post-Maoist times are significant and constitutive features of 20th century Sino-Tibetan social and intellectual history, notably in terms of the dynamics and strategies of appropriation, adaptation, rejection and reformulation of the 'other' culture that Tibetans elaborated in reaction to Chinese political and cultural annexing politics. Those strategies – which stemmed from present political circumstances and cultural preservation needs – certainly participated in the Tibetan transition from tradition into previously unheard-of creative forms of modernity. These continuities of the Tibetan reactions to Chinese designs between the pre-Maoist and (post-)Maoist periods, also show that there existed continuities between Chinese pre-Maoist and (post-)Maoist politics vis-à-vis Tibet, notably in terms of the pattern and intentions of Chinese policies, and the political and cultural strategies of assimilation in Tibet. What is sharply different between the two periods mentioned above, however, is the depth, extension and effectiveness of those policies in Tibet, and in Kham and Eastern Tibet in particular, given the fact that Central Tibet was still, *de facto*, at that time, under the direct administration of the Dalai Lama's government, the Ganden Podrang (Tib. *Dga' ldan pho brang*), and that Chinese policies and measures implemented in Kham were not implemented there.

8. Conclusion

This article has explored the complex and inextricable connection among individual journeys, literature, and creativity, and the epoch-making events of macro-history through the emblematic history of a Khampa woman, Blo gros chos mtsho. It has shown how individual histories can sometimes acquire strong emblematic historical significance, and has investigated the deep analogical relationships linking individual, social and cultural/national bodies. By following Blo gros chos mtsho on her personal journey, detailing her cultural and political activities, and exploring the large spectrum of personalities that she met, socialized and collaborated with, I hope to have brought to life a cross-section of Kham social and intellectual history during the first half of the 20th-century, a society in which Blo gros chos mtsho played a significant and proactive role. Why then have her story and her activities so long been unacknowledged and left untold in both Western scholarship and mainstream Tibetan and Chinese cultural discourses?

identity, agency and displacement in (post-)Maoist Tibetan literature, and the correlated highly debated question of whether literature written in Chinese by Tibetan writers can be defined as "Tibetan literature", see for example L. Maconi, 2002, 2007, 2008 (defended in), 2008(a), 2008(b)-2009.

The answers to this kind of question are always complex and multifactorial, but it is relevant to point out here a number of possible converging explanations. One of these reasons is simply that the secular Sino-Tibetan intellectual history of the first half of the 20th century is a large field of research which has so far drawn only limited attention from the Western academic world. A second reason may be that, from the point of view of mainstream Tibetan cultural discourse inside and outside of Tibet, Blo gros chos mtsho's story does not precisely correspond to a certain mythology of heroism, anti-Chinese resistance, and uncompromising opposition that has been developed within familial, religious, political histories, where Sino-Tibetan intercultural relations and complex cross-cultural narratives are less valued than strongman and strongwoman narratives. Reasons of gender chauvinism and a certain dislike for calling anything written in Chinese "Tibetan" literature, should also be mentioned here. Finally, another reason may be that, from the point of view of the Chinese mainstream intellectual discourse on Tibet and Kham in particular, Blo gros chos mtsho's story and writings – which could in principle well fit a certain politically-correct Chinese discourse of compromise, negotiation and in-betweenness – have long been overshadowed by the histories of more prominent male figures in her intellectual circle, Ren Naiqiang and Paul Sherap among others.

This article has shown that, despite all these obstacles, Blo gros chos mtsho flourished as a figure of highly emblematic significance. She is notably representative of the transformations that Kham society was undergoing in the first half of the 20th century, while, at the same time, she embodied social, political and literary issues and concerns which were to become pervasive and enduring in Kham and across Tibet soon after her death in 1949, during Maoist and post-Maoist times. Among these are the tension between her intimate Khampa self and the acquired culture of her Chinese education and marriage; the negotiation between the Tibetan language of her origin and the Chinese language of her learning/intellectual formation; her concerns over place and displacement; the identifying relationship between the self and the place (her own dying body and her *pha yul*); the ambivalence between two simultaneous processes (that is, the disapproval and, at the same time, the appropriation of certain aspects of the "other" culture); and her intercultural role in the efforts to negotiate a gap between the two worlds. In short, she embodies issues of agency and identity which she experienced through the refractive lens of her identity as a Khampa woman, and which she expressed in a very modern way. In this regard, she is a precursor of a certain Sino-Tibetan literary and intellectual modernity.

Blo gros chos mtsho's writings – thanks to their simplicity, genuineness and intimate tone – are the expression of her original, distinctive and modern voice. Through her essays, we see her remembering, thinking and doubting, we see her in action, we visualize her resolution and determination. We learn about her proactive, positive and enterprising attitude; we especially learn about her preoccupations (the plight of her *pha yul*), her priorities (education, the most powerful equalizer), her views, aspirations and projects (the proposal presented at the National Assembly in Nanjing, but also a project to build a self-sufficient farm in Nyarong) and the intercultural role she wanted to play in all of this. She was particularly determined to get her voice heard; this is an essential and recurrent point in her writings: the importance of expressing one's constructive voice, having it heard and striving to have one's proposals and projects realised, without violence, without weapons.

By reading Blo gros chos mtsho's essays in a cross-cultural perspective, one experiences a sort of revitalising explosion of canons: the canon of Tibetan tradition, its established values and literary patterns, those of *rnam thar* for instance, and its hagiographical narrative, and the canon of classical Chinese literature, its standards and normative discourse which still permeated the Chinese intellectual arena in spite of the ongoing strivings towards literary modernisation. The very axioms upon which canons are based are undermined, as if unintentionally, but with deep determination, elegance, sobriety, audacity, freedom and modernity. Blo gros chos mtsho was a woman of mediation and negotiation; her life and her writings were the fruit of intercultural encounters, the expression of an open mind and of a certain intellectual hybridity. Such is the cultural history of Tibet: a multilayered, complex and extremely rich re-elaboration and adaptation of endogenous creativities and exogenous encounters.

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