

Traders as Cultural Brokers on the Sino-Tibetan Borderland during the Republican Period^{*}

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Abstract: This paper follows research trends in borderland studies that view the borderland as a permeable "zone of contact" that allowed migrants and indigenous people to fluidly interact, trade, and exchange ideas. The paper draws on variety of sources. These include biographical accounts of both Tibetan and Chinese traders collected in gazetteers of counties in Kham as well as in cultural and historical materials compiled by various counties, and secondary works on Kham published during the Republican period. It argues that these "cultural brokers" occupied a position that cannot be explained purely in terms of ethnicity and political affiliation. Rather, these individuals carved out a unique space determined by their personal self-interest and survival strategies during an uncertain and turbulent period. The reciprocity inherent in the process of forging frontier society is clearly evident when studying these historical materials. Acculturation clearly went both ways. This is clear not only from documentation

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of the close cultural interactions between Han Chinese immigrants and indigenous Tibetans. It is also demonstrated in blended Chinese and Tibetan cultural practices and customs. This evidence contrasts with the dominant view that Chinese culture possesses overwhelming power and transformed indigenous cultures.

The history of encounter and interaction between the Tibetans and Chinese is often portrayed as one of competition and conflict, control and resistance. In the late Qing and early Republican period, the authority of Chinese governments in Kham (khams; Eastern Tibet) expanded considerably. In tandem with this expansion, the size and strength of Chinese administration of Kham grew as well. This situation has contributed to presumptions about the assertion of authority by the Qing and later by Republican China and about local resistance from the Khampas (*khams pa*). While tension and conflict certainly existed, we should not let this obliterate mutual accommodation and exchange. When reviewing the history of this period, it is easy to get a sense that conflict and confrontation between the Chinese authorities and local Khampas were relentless; indeed, most of the historical events of this period point to ongoing contention between Kashak (*bka' shag*) in Lhasa and the Chinese governments for hegemony and control of Kham region. However, if we use a wider lens to explore the history of Kham in this period and view encounters as multifaceted, a different picture comes into focus. We are able to see the region not as a zone of conflict but a zone of mutual learning and accommodation. The region is popularly described as the "Tibetan-Yi corridor"¹ in which different ethnic groups interacted with each other in political, cultural and economic spheres.

This paper follows research trends in recent borderland studies that view the borderland as a permeable "zone of contact" where traders, migrants and indigenous people participated in fluid interaction and exchanges. In particular, this paper explores the roles of merchants and traders. It positions them as not simply engaged in exchange for commodities; rather, it views them as agents/cultural broker. These dealers fostered interaction and exchange between Chinese and Hui migrants and indigenous Tibetans; along with the exchange of goods, their activities provided a conduit for new ideas. Traders not only occupied an important position as facilitators of trade and commerce but also were spreaders of ideas. In spite of their significance, due to the paucity of archival sources and Tibetan sources, the study of the roles of traders as cultural brokers in the Sino-Tibetan borderland has not been explored. Addressing

1 The prominent Chinese anthropologist Fei Xiaotong (1910-2005) first identified basin of Nujiang, Lancang, and Jinsha rivers as "Tibetan-Yi Corridor" in his speech entitled "Issues Concerning the Ethnic Identification of China" at a conference sponsored by the National Committee of the People's Consultative Conference in 1978. Geographically, it refers to basin of the six rivers, i.e. Nujiang (Rgyal mo ngul chu), Lancang (Rdza chu), Jinsha ('Bri chu), Yalong (Nyag chu, Dadu (Rgyal rong rgyal mo ngul chu) and Minjiang rivers, that borders Tibet on the west and the Yi majority areas on the east. Since initial observations by Fei Xiaotong (费孝通), the subject has become a popular area of research for Chinese social scientists.

this challenge, this article draws on fragmented materials scattered in a variety of sources. Short biographical accounts of both Tibetan and Chinese traders found in gazetteers of counties in Kham and in series of collected cultural and historical materials is one set of resources; works on Kham published during the Republican period is another. Through case studies of several traders and trading families as cultural brokers, I will illustrate the vital roles played by these agents in the interaction, collision, and cultural integration between native Tibetans and Chinese and Hui immigrants.

Categories of Culture Brokers

During the late Qing and Republican periods, many different individuals occupied positions that facilitated communication, commercial exchanges, and interaction between the Tibetans and Chinese. We can tentatively sort these agents into four basic categories. The first category includes indigenous Tibetan leaders and Chinese officials. Indigenous leaders included both chieftains and religious leaders who based their authority on hereditary or religious status respectively; Chinese officials were agents of the Qing or Republican China. It would have been natural for officials from both sides to interact within the formal space of administration. The second category is particularly associated with the Republican era. This group includes scholar cum administrators who sought not only to manage the Kham region but also to provide the ideological foundation for the incorporation of Kham within the modern Chinese nation state.² The third important category includes merchants and traders who facilitated trade and commerce. The interactions of these agents were extensive and embraced both formal and informal space. Some merchants and traders — such as, Ding Zhenghua (丁正华) and the Pangda trading family to be discussed in detail later — also occupied official positions. As officials, they introduced and promoted new ideas and new agricultural techniques. The fourth category includes individuals who were commonly known as *tongsi* (the interpreters 通司) in Chinese. Their knowledge of Tibetan and Chinese language elevated their status as facilitators of communication. Importantly, their role extended well beyond merely translating between languages; rather, they came to occupy an important status as educated elite and sometimes

2 For details about the second group, refer to Yudru Tsomu, 2012: 1-26.

even as local dignitaries.³

These categories of agents not only facilitated administration and commerce but also played important roles in cementing the cultural and social discourse of Kham in the emergence of a new modern China. The emerging modern Chinese nation state no longer ignored Kham as an insignificant and uncivilized remote region. Indeed, since the late Qing period, the Chinese viewed Kham not only as a vital territory for the assertion of Qing authority and safeguarding the western frontiers, they also viewed it a fertile land that had the potential to receive Chinese settlers from overpopulated inland Chinese regions.⁴ The process of fashioning Kham as an integral part of modern China that began in the Qing was accelerated during the Republican period. This is not to say that the local Khampas were passive recipients of Qing and Republican efforts to incorporate the Kham region. The period also saw a growing assertion of Kham identity along with a rapid development of local identities and self-fashioning of its position within China. Most notable is the advance of the "Khampa Rule of Kham" movement in the 1930s.⁵ This movement sought to create a unified Kham identity by asserting local power based on ethnicity.⁶

The Rise of Merchant Class

The process of positing Kham as either an integral part of new China or as an autonomous Tibetan space drew active participation from both local elites and the emerging Han elite in the Kham region. Members of both the Tibetan and Chinese merchant class became main agents

3 Certainly there were also women who acted as translators, but their role has not been well recognized. For instance, heads of many *guozhuang* trading families in Dartsendo (Dar rtse mdo) in the early twentieth century were actually women. These women had proficiency in various Tibetan dialects and Chinese, which equipped them with the eloquence required to serve as brokers, facilitating and successfully sealing business deals by prevailing upon buyers and sellers in business transactions. In addition, the status of women business owners as aristocratic women provided the means for them to be well-informed, sophisticated women, to know the necessary etiquette, and to develop the ability to socialize and negotiate with ease. At the turn of the twentieth century, their aristocratic backgrounds also gave them the possibility of receiving an education in Chinese schools in addition to traditional Tibetan schooling. For details about *guozhuang* trading families in Dartsendo, refer to Patrick Ramzi Booz, 2011; Chen Yunqi, 2008; Gao Jichang and Lai Zuozhong, 1985: 130-144; Lin Junhua, 2005: 10-14; Liu Shiquan, 1988: 1-27; Pengcuo Zhuoma (Püntsok Drölma), 2010; Ren Fujia, 2012; Yang Guopu, 2009: 1-10; Zeng Wenqiong and Yang Jiaming, 1989: 14-21 and 33; Yudru Tsomu, 2016 (19): 71-121.

4 See Ren Naiqiang, 1990: 2; Ren Naiqiang, 1934: 240-96; Dahpon David Ho, 2008: 210-46.

5 The movement is known as *kangpe rangsi rangkyong* or *kangpe rangde rangpon* in Tibetan, and *kangren zhikang* in Chinese.

6 For a detailed discussion of the movement, see Peng Wenbin, 2002: 57-84; You Zhen, 2010: 104-108; Wang Juan, 2013: 25-30; Luo Shaoming, 2015: 1-5.

and facilitators for the creation of regional identity. Initially, Chinese merchants chiefly engaged in the export of luxury goods, including porcelain and tea; later on, they traded European goods such as clocks, watches, and weapons. In fact, Chinese merchants were the first to introduce automatic weapons into the Kham region. It is easy to identify individual members of the merchant class by their ethnicity, their home origin, or the goods they specialized in selling. When classifying Chinese merchants according to their home origins, the majority of merchants in Kham in modern times were from Shaanxi, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces. The merchants from different regions also specialized in/monopolized particular trade in specific commodities, notably, the Yunnanese specialized in the tea trade. According to particular trade items, they could be classed into various business groups (*bang* 帮).⁷

In contrast to the Tibetan merchants and traders, the Chinese were associated with individual trading families, some of whom owned major shops and stores in major towns along the main trade routes in southern and northern Kham.⁸ As far as we can tell, the majority of these Chinese traders did not have institutional affiliations such as with monasteries or belong to a trading firm back in their home region. The most interesting aspect of the emergence of Chinese merchant class is that they were migrants in search of fortune and opportunities, and some of them were ex-officer-cum-traders or ex-soldier-cum-traders who took advantage of their wide social and political network to engage in such lucrative trading activities as selling opium or gold.⁹ This is closely related to the expansion of late Qing rule into the frontier regions and facilitation provided by the Qing military and administrative system that was being introduced into the frontier region. To some degree, the emergence of the Chinese merchant class in the frontier region and the development of the authority of the Qing and the Republican government in the region converged.

Shaanxi Merchants

Chinese merchants from Shaanxi province (*sha'an shang* 陕商 ; *laosha'an* 老陕) penetrated

7 Lai Zuohong, 2009: 13-4.

8 While the route in southern Kham is known as *nanlu* (the south road 南路), *guandao* (the official route 官道) or *jalam* (the tea road 茶路), the route in northern Kham is called *beilu* (the north road 北路) or *shangdao* (the trade route 商道).

9 Ren Naiqiang, 2009: 401-404, 409-410.

deep into Kham and came to dominate Sino-Tibetan trade in Kham.¹⁰ The majority of Chinese merchants from inland China, including Shaanxi traders, were drawn to Kham in the early eighteenth century; at that time, Kham had become increasingly crucial as the thoroughfare connecting trade and commerce between inland China and Central Tibet.¹¹ Thus, it is no wonder that Xizang jicheng [Journey to Tibet], written as early as the end of the Kangxi period (1661-1722), specifically pointed out that: "There are many people from Xian Prefecture (referring to the capital of Shaanxi province) doing business here [Dartsendo; Kangding or Ta-chien-lu]."¹²

The wide distribution of Shaanxi merchants in Kham is reflected in the lyrics of a popular song: "Wherever one travels in the world, one will find *toufu* (豆腐), native Shaanxi people (*laosha'an*) and dogs." These lyrics vividly show that Shaanxi merchants were engaged in trade almost everywhere in Kham.¹³ Among the stores owned by Chinese traders in Dartsendo, row upon row of these were owned by Shaanxi merchants. These formed a street itself, which was popularly known as *laosha'an jie* (Shaanxi Street, 老陕街).¹⁴ In 1890s, Tibetan merchants controlled some 40 percent of business in Dartsendo, the main center of trade between Tibetan areas and China, and the Chinese traders were in majority with 60 percent, and of these Han businessmen five out of six were said to be from Shaanxi.¹⁵ Up until the Republican period, among over 240 established merchants (*zuoshang*, 坐商) in Dartsendo, over half of them originated from Shaanxi.¹⁶ Similarly, in the town of Batang ('Ba' thang, 巴塘), there was also a street called *laosha'an jie*, where most shops were owned by Shaanxi merchants.¹⁷

Though Shaanxi merchants' primary objective was trade and profit, nevertheless, their activities played an important role in strengthening Sino-Tibetan relations and facilitating cultural exchanges. In particular, confronted with the vast Tibetan market, in an effort to establish a wide social network, Shaanxi traders attached great importance to their social

10 They purchased and transported to China most of the Tibetan medicinal products; thus, they dominated that business going east, as they controlled the tea trade out of Ya'an going west. A large Shaanxi-run company named Tianzeng Gong (天增公), with offices in Ya'an and Dartsendo (Kangding, 康定), handled much of this trade. For details about this trade, see Patrick Ramzi Booz, 2011: 177-222.

11 Cao Lunbin, 2003: 39-40.

12 Wu Tingwei, 1985: 32.

13 Wang Zhenzhong, 2006: 91-7.

14 See Lai Zuozhong, 2009: 22.

15 See Sichuan wenshi ziliao xuanji, 1964, cited from Patrick Ramzi Booz, 2011: 305. Wu Jiuyan (34, 35), claims the Shaanxi merchants controlled half of Dartsendo's capital during the late Qing and early Republican period. However, as Patrick Booz rightly points out, it should be kept in mind that other Chinese from Shanxi, Gansu, Yunnan, Sichuan, Hunan and elsewhere, and Hui Muslims, also engaged in the Tibet trade. See Wu Jiuyan, 1995: 27-36; Patrick Ramzi Booz, 2011: 306.

16 See Lai Zuozhong, 2009: 22.

17 See Yao Ying, 1984: 232; Gan Ba, 1996: 371-2.

interaction with indigenous people across social strata. In addition to penetrating deeply into the Kham region, wealthy Shaanxi merchants were frequently guests of honor of the upper class of the local society and attended various important occasions in which local officials, indigenous leaders and others were present.¹⁸ Such interactions show, to a certain degree, that the upper class of the local Tibetan society recognized the importance of Shaanxi merchants. For Shaanxi merchants, the most direct and effective means of strengthening interaction with local Tibetans was through intermarriage. To better integrate into the local society so as to establish close contact with the locals and to minimize troubles at home when engaging in trading activities, many Shaanxi merchants chose to marry local Tibetan women and to establish a family in Kham.¹⁹ Affinity not only strengthened the social resources that Shaanxi traders could draw on to promote their commercial activities, it also enabled them to enter local society directly. This broadened their points of contact and allowed them to be accepted by and to interact with local Tibetans. As a prominent cultural group, Shaanxi merchants' close interaction with the local Tibetans would inevitably have had a great impact on the integration of Han Chinese with Tibetan cultures as well as on the inter-ethnic interactions between Han Chinese and Tibetans.

When trading in Kham, Shaanxi merchants had to take the initiative to adapt to the local Tibetan way of life; at the same time, as a new cultural group, they also introduced new material items and different living habits from inland China. In this way, Shaanxi traders were dual carriers of culture; that is, they took the initiative to accept Tibetan culture and also to spread Han Chinese culture. In towns where Shaanxi traders lived in a comparatively compact community, Han Chinese and Tibetan cultures mixed with each other. As a result, some cultural geographical units with distinctive regional features gradually emerged.²⁰ Taking the initiative to follow Tibetan customs and habits as well as choosing inter-ethnic marriages made it possible for Shaanxi merchants to integrate quickly into local society in Kham. Willingness to accommodate local customs would have been beneficial to the success of their commercial activities. Their familiarity and intimate experience with Tibetan ways of life would, in turn, also have been useful in their efforts to integrate Tibetan cultural elements into their daily life. Due to the unique natural and social environment of Kham, it was more likely for scattered individual Shaanxi traders and families formed between Shaanxi traders and local Tibetan women to follow a Tibetan way of life; moreover, it increased the likelihood that their

18 To cite one particular case, when Feng Yunxian (Kelzang Chodron, 冯云仙), the special commissioner dispatched by the nationalist government, arrived at Drango (Luhuo, 炉霍), the local authorities held a banquet for her: "At the banquet, those present included Getsong (Ke'u tshang) Hutuktu and another elder Hutuktu. There were three people from Shaanxi, who were wealthy traders here and who spoke fluent Tibetan." See Feng Yunxian, 1937: 47-59.

19 Zhu Zengjun, 2005: 161.

20 Shi Shuo and Zou Libo, 2011: 9.

assimilation would have a significant impact on their descendants.

In the early 1920s, Eric Teichman, the vice consul of Great Britain, wrote the following in his account of his travel in Kham:

...and I was therefore surprised when a man, to all appearances a Tibetan, came up to me on the flat roof of Deji Podrang and addressed me in fluent Chinese. He turned out not to be a Tibetan at all, but a *Lao Shan* (a local term designating merchants from Shensi province)...They are completely Tibetanised in dress and customs, and the second and third generations appear to become Tibetans altogether.²¹

Obviously what Teichman saw was not an individual case. For some Shaanxi merchants, doing business in Kham was also a journey to becoming immigrants and eventually to making a home. A Chinese traveler in Kham provided an interesting description of his encountered another Han, whose ancestral home was Shaanxi, and he described the latter as follows:

[It] had been three generations since [the old man's family] came to live in Kham, and now he has a son who is a monk in a monastery and a daughter who remains at home by having a son-in-law married into the family. The old man can still speak a few Chinese sentences, [but when I] asked him his ancestor's surname, he could not tell me anymore.²²

Clearly, this is a description of someone who has adapted to the Tibetan cultural milieu and was Tibetanized to the extent that he was sending a son to the monastery and had discarded the tradition of ancestral surname. For a Chinese it would have been unthinkable to allow their daughters to remain at home to inherit the family property by having sons-in-law marry into their families, whereas such practice is common among the Tibetans.

Adopting and accepting Tibetan customs and habits was not limited to individual traders in Kham. This is established in my fieldwork conducted in 2010 and confirmed by research findings by other scholars on the town of Batang. In Batang, the Chinese lived in a tightly knit community. At the end of the Qing and beginning of the Republican period there were quite a lot of Shaanxi merchants there. Estimates made by the local people, during the Republican period, suggest that 50 to 60 percent of the residents at Laojie (the Old Street, 老街) of Batang were descendants of inter-ethnic marriages between Han Chinese and local Tibetans.²³ The

21 See Eric Teichman, 2000: 76-7.

22 See Xu Sizhi, 1938: 66-74.

23 Shi Shuo and Zou Libo, 2011: 49-54.

inter-ethnic marriages between Shaanxi traders and local Tibetan women created families that blended Chinese and Tibetan living habits. This integration impacted the daily life and culture of their descendants, especially that of female descendants. Their daily life mainly reflected Tibetan cultural styles. Having adopted Tibetan dietary and living habits, they dressed in Tibetan clothes, spoke Tibetan in their daily life, used Tibetan names, and believed in Tibetan Buddhism. In fact, some first generation Shaanxi traders had already accepted and followed a great number of Tibetan living habits.²⁴ Importantly, even while Shaanxi traders tried their best to respect and imitate Tibetan customs and habits, this did not mean that they completely gave up their own traditions or ways of life. This is mainly reflected in the choice of cultures available to Shaanxi trader groups living in comparatively compact communities in towns. The rise of major towns in Kham was closely related to the development of trade and commerce between Sichuan and Central Tibet. As noted above, in both Dartsendo and Batang, some streets emerged as a result of the presence of Shaanxi traders. On these streets there were often cultural facilities from inland China, and Shaanxi merchants frequently sponsored various traditional ceremonies and recreational activities that were performed on these streets or at fixed locations. Provincial guild halls (*huiguan* 会馆) as well as Buddhist and Taoist temples were common Chinese-style buildings established and built by inland Chinese merchants, including those from Shaanxi. In fact, in Republican-period Dartsendo, there were as many as three altars of a Taoist branch known as *feiluanjiao* (Flying Phoenix teaching 飞鸾教) and a dozen of Buddhist and Taoist temples.²⁵ Similarly, one could also find as many as ten Chinese-style Buddhist and Taoist temples established in the town of Batang; these accounted for more than half of the number of buildings in the town.²⁶ Prominent examples of such buildings include *Shansha'an xiangci* (山陕乡祠), also known as *Qinjin huiguan* – *Guandi miao* (秦晋会馆 – 关帝庙) and *Caishen miao* (财神庙) in Dartsendo²⁷ – and the *Guandi miao* (关帝庙) in Batang.²⁸

Some Chinese trader and merchant groups had effective self-administration capacities and used grassroots organizing to carry out various social activities in provincial guild halls as well as at Buddhist and Taoist temples. In Dartsendo, on the ninth day of the first lunar month, the Temple of the God of Wealth was where Shanxi and Shaanxi business groups held the temple

24 My interview with Kelzang Chompel (Bskal bzang chos 'phel) from Batang, a descendant of a Shaanxi merchant, at his home in Dartsendo in 2012; my interview with the son of Shaanxi merchant He Xianglin in Jachung (Bya khyung, 夏邛) town, the seat of Batang County on October 22, 2010; my interview with Gewang (Dge dbang) at his house in Jachung town on October 24, 2010; Shi Shuo and Zou Libo, 2011:8; You Zhen, 2010: 9-15.

25 *Kangding xianzhi*, 1995: 450-1.

26 *Ren Naiqiang*, 2009: 58-359.

27 "Qianlong dajianlu tingzhi", 2003: 8; Liu Zanting, 1990: 14.

28 Qian Zhaotang, 2003: 506.

fair for the god of wealth;²⁹ and on the fifteenth day of the third lunar month the Temple of the God of Wealth was conventionally where the Chamber of Commerce of Batang held a dinner party.³⁰ While Chinese businessmen offered sacrifices to the god of wealth, discussed common issues concerning the community, and held the dinner party at the provincial guild hall or the temple of the god of wealth, they also had Shaanxi Opera (*Qinqiang* 秦腔) and Sichuan Opera (*Chuanxi* 川戏) performed on the stage there. They also sponsored similar performances during festivals in the local communities. Since the mid-eighteenth century, during every Spring Festival Holidays the Shaanxi and Shaanxi firms and shops concentrated in the western street of Dartsendo would sponsor such grand performances along streets as the boat lanterns (*chuandeng* 船灯), stilts (*gaoqiao* 高跷), horse lanterns (*mamadeng* 马马灯), etc.³¹ In the Republican period, during the Spring Festival Holidays, Shaanxi merchants in the town of Tawu (Rta 'u; Daofo 道孚) would also sponsor a lantern show with colorful boat lanterns and horse lanterns in spacious locations such as at government offices, on the corners of the main street, and in a few major *guozhuang* (锅庄) trading houses.³² Since the buildings and cultural landscape in such towns as Dartsendo, Batang, and Tawu expressed Chinese style, these towns displayed a comparatively stronger atmosphere of Chinese culture. By using provincial guild halls as well as Buddhist and Taoist temples as locations for communal activities, Shaanxi business groups and their descendants, together with other Chinese immigrants, maintained various traditional ceremonies of inland China.³³ Chinese culture and living habits also had an influence on local Tibetan women. It was well-known across Kham that local Tibetan women married to Chinese men in Batang and Chamdo (Chab mdo) had become expert in making various foods made from wheat flour.³⁴ There is a popular saying in Kham, depicting the extent of Chinese influence among women: "One cannot eat *Tsampa* [*rtsam pa*, roasted barley flour] from Litang, and one should not marry young women from Batang [because most of them are influenced by Chinese culture]."³⁵ Through their presence and intermarriage, many Chinese cultural practices and habits came to be adopted by the local people, especially customs. In the annual social and communal activities, Shaanxi-merchant groups showed that they no longer saw themselves as merely itinerant immigrant traders; rather, because they belonged to a social group that had been integrated into the life of the local community — they were here to stay. Due to the

29 See *Kangding xianzhi*, 1995: 465.

30 See Shi Shuo and Zou Libo, 2011: 53.

31 See *Kangding Xianzhi*, 1995: 465, 518.

32 Jiang Yuxing and Qing Zhendong, 1985:157-69.

33 Shi Shuo and Zou Libo, 2011: 49-54; Shi Shuo and Zou Libo, 2011: 9.

34 Yang Zhonghua, 1930: 27-32.

35 Ren Naiqiang, 2009: 338. The reason one cannot eat *tsampa* from Litang is because the wind there is strong, which causes there to be a great amount of dust in it. Similarly, one should not marry young women from Batang because most of them are influenced by Chinese culture and would, therefore, not make good wives.

influence of the community life of Shaanxi merchants and the choices made by individual Shaanxi traders themselves, Shaanxi merchants in Dartsendo, Batang, and other towns retained many habits, customs, and life styles of inland China. For instance, Shaanxi traders in Batang, Tawu, Dartsendo and other towns dressed in long robes with Mandarin jackets and wore Fedora hats. They would also perform dragon-lantern dances during the Spring Festival.³⁶ A poem from the 1930s, *Batang yuelingqu* (The Poem of the Climate and Phenology in the First Lunar Month of Batang), vividly testifies that the custom of watching lanterns on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month was flourishing in Batang. Written by Kelzang Tsering (Bskal bzang tshe ring) and Lobzang Chonjor (Blo bzang chos 'byor; Liu Jiaju), two well-known Tibetan scholars and prominent politicians from Batang, the poem states: "The first lunar month is the New Year; men, women, old and young were in their finest attire. *Huqin* (Chinese violins 胡琴) and flutes were playing lively; the stream of people who went to watch the lanterns on the fifteenth day of the first month was as vast as the sea."³⁷

More evidence of the way Shaanxi merchant perpetuated traditional Han Chinese culture is reported in the fieldwork conducted by the sociologist Ke Xiangfeng (柯象峰) in Dartsendo in the late 1930s. After visiting a Shaanxi store, he described it as follows: "The front part of the store has the exterior of a stone warehouse. One reaches the trading place as soon as one enters the hall. In the hall there are latticed windows and doors with carved couplets. Also, equipment such as seats, scales, etc. are on display. In the corner behind the door there is a brick bed warmed by a fire underneath, and it must be the place to receive visiting traders to smoke."³⁸ The internal structure of the store described by Ke Xiangfeng would have been similar to the layout of stores in inland China. In addition, it was probably common practice for many Chinese traders to purchase land for farming, cementing their ties to the region. The acquisition of land related to the traditional Chinese notion of attaching great importance to agriculture; it also reflects the reality that having various means of subsistence were important in guaranteeing one could make a living in the special environment of Kham. A Shaanxi merchant known as Wang Da married and settled down at the Rinang (Ri nang; Rilong 日龙) village, Chakdu (Lcags mdud; Zhanhua 瞻化, present-day Nyarong county in Kardze prefecture), while continuing to trade, this Shaanxi merchant began to reclaim wasteland in the village and purchased properties for his family.³⁹ Similarly, the majority of Chinese traders in Batang also engaged in agriculture.⁴⁰

Shaanxi traders and their descendants simultaneously adopted Tibetan cultural elements

36 Ke Xiangfeng, 1940: 180-201.

37 Gesang Ciren (Bskal bzang tshe ring) and Liu Jiaju (Blo bzang chos 'byor), 1985: 58.

38 Ke Xiangfeng, 1940: 180-201.

39 See Suli Xusheng, 1938 (1.3): 36-42.

40 Lai Zuozhong, 2009: 17.

while continuing Chinese traditions. In quotidian affairs, i.e., food, clothing, housing, and transportation, they combined Chinese and Tibetan customs. When they held a Chinese-style funeral, they also invited Tibetan lamas to recite scriptures and also participated in Buddhist animal release (*tshe tar*; *fangsheng* 放生) practices. Meanwhile, some Chinese cultural elements also exerted an influence on local Tibetans. Tibetans in Dartsendo adopted the Chinese dietary habit of having three meals every day, and they used Chinese-style tables, stools, bed curtains, etc.⁴¹ At the New Year, Tibetans in Litang would imitate the Chinese in paying a New Year's call; this custom was first started by Shaanxi merchants.⁴² To this day, both Chinese and Tibetans in the town of Batang follow the customs of putting up couplets and images of the door god as well as worshipping the god of the hearth during the Spring Festival, visiting graves to honor the memory of the deceased during the Tomb-Sweeping Day, and celebrating the Mid-Autumn Festival and the Dragon Boat Festival. All these customs appear to have been introduced by Shaanxi merchants.⁴³

When Shaanxi merchants engaged in farming, they introduced some new crops and production techniques into the Kham region. When He Xuren (何许人) traveled to Batang during the Republican period, he learned that the area did not produce wheat in the past. He comments: "In the beginning of the Qing period, Shaanxi merchants who were trading in Batang saw that the soil quality and climate there were suitable for growing crops, so they brought wheat seeds from Shaanxi to Batang. Therefore, up until now, the local people still refer to wheat produced in Batang (Ba'an 巴安) as *ximaizi* (i.e., Shaanxi wheat 西麦子)." ⁴⁴ After wheat was introduced to Batang, the number of people who ate Batang noodles (popularly known as *maomian* 冒面) accounted for half of the residents in the town of Batang, and these noodles were sold in markets as distant as Dartsendo. Traditionally, Shaanxi people have been very good at using wheat flour to make various foods; thus, because of their influence, even up to now various foods made of wheat flour are still important components of the dietary structure of Chinese and Tibetan residents in the town of Batang. The local Tibetans even directly use terms in Shaanxi dialect such as *baozi* (steamed bun 包子), *miankuaizi* (noodle 面块子) and others in the local Tibetan dialect. In Dartsendo, Batang, and other towns, a traditional food culture emerged that was different from what was commonplace in neighboring areas in the countryside.

41 Chen Chongkai, 1998: 43-8.

42 He Juefei, 1988: 109.

43 My interview with Kelzang Chömpel from Batang, a descendant of a Shaanxi merchant, at his home in Dartsendo in 2012; my interview with the son of Shaanxi merchant He Xianglin in Jachung (Bya khyung) town, the seat of Batang County on October 22, 2010; my interview with Gewang (Dge dbang) at his house in Jachung town on October 24, 2010; Shi Shuo and Zou Libo, 2011, 8; You Zhen, 2010 (1): 9-15.

44 He Xuren, 1942 (4.2-3): 69-74.

The Barbarian King Ding of Tawu

Ding Zhenghua (1869-1935 丁正华), courtesy name Peizhi (培芝), was one of the most notable Chinese merchants who came to dominate the trade in Tawu in northern Kham. He can be classed as belonging to the third category of traders described in the first section. Ding Zhenghua was a typical example of Chinese-merchant-turned local gentry who not only functioned as cultural brokers. Rather, due to their familiarity with Chinese culture and institutions as well as local Tibetan culture and traditions, they also played an active political role in Kham. Ding was known to the Chinese as "barbarian king Ding" (Ding manwang 丁蛮王) because of his ability to work with the Tibetans. Ding's parents were porcelain traders from Luling (庐陵) in Jiangxi (江西) Province that moved to Dartsendo. It appears that the family made a modest living there. Ding was born and raised in Dartsendo.⁴⁵ During the period most Chinese merchants, except the afore-mentioned Shaanxi ones, stationed themselves in major trading centers such as Dartsendo and rarely ventured beyond. Yet, Ding himself sought the opportunity to enhance his own fortune by moving into the interior of Kham. It appears that Ding Zhenghua was very successful in achieving a commanding position as a merchant in Tawu. This success is partly attributed to his wife, the daughter of the Fan family (范氏) from Suining (遂宁) County in Sichuan Province. She was well-known for being public-spirited, providing assistance to those in need, managing family affairs well, and having the admiration of local people.⁴⁶ By the beginning of the twentieth century, Ding had accumulated considerable wealth and power in the region.

In his early career, Ding did not occupy any government position, but developments in the Sino-Tibetan frontier provided him an opportunity to enhance his position in the local Chinese government administration. The government's objective of consolidating its rule and incorporating Kham into the new administrative structure converged with Ding's consolidation of and dominance over trade in Tawu. This placed Ding in a very powerful position. He became indispensable for the successive Chinese regimes. His importance to the local government is evidenced by the series of official positions he held over the years. In 1910 when *Daowu shezhiju* (Preparatory Bureau for the Establishment of the Tawu County 道坞设政局) was established to replace *Daowu xun* (Tawu Outpost 道坞汛), he was appointed as *shangdong* (the director of trade and commerce 商董). In this capacity, he was responsible for establishing a periodic country fair at which the local people would participate on the first day and the fifteenth day of every lunar month. Meanwhile, as a prominent local figure who

45 See *Daofu xianzhi*, 1997: 550. However, the Chinese historian Ren Naiqiang recounts that Ding was originally from Lezhi (乐至) County, Sichuan Province. See Ren Naiqiang, 2009: 407.

46 See *Daofu xianzhi*, 1997: 551.

was familiar with the local conditions in Tawu, Ding Zhenghua contributed to establishing and consolidating the local Republican government. He assisted Yang Zonghan (杨宗汉), the Preparatory Commissioner for the Establishment of the Tawu County (*shezhi weiyuan* 设治委员), in demarcating boundaries of various townships in Tawu, conducting census, fixing taxes and levies, and reforming the judicial system. In the same year, he was also appointed as *xuedong* (the chief director of education 学董). In this capacity, he established a Mandarin school in Longwang *miao* (The Temple of the Dragon King 龙王庙).⁴⁷ Furthermore, because of his knowledge of the border region, he served as a consultant to Qing general Fu Songmu (傅松林) during the "reform of replacing indigenous leaders with government appointed officials" in northern Kham.⁴⁸ In particular, in 1911 he was appointed as a guide with official rank for the Qing troops by Fu Songmu; due to his meritorious military performance in the campaign against the Yukhok (Yul 'khok) chieftain (Yuke *anfusi*, i.e., Yuke Mollification Commissioner 玉科安抚司) who refused to turn in his official seal, Ding was awarded with a third-class merit citation.⁴⁹

While Ding secured a privileged position with the Chinese authorities, his relationship with the local Tibetans became increasingly complex. In September 1911 the influential Nyintso (Nyi mtsho) monastery (Lingque si 灵雀寺) in Tawu led the local Tibetans to launch a rebellion against the local Chinese government. At this time, Tibetans also turned against Ding as an agent of the Chinese government.⁵⁰ The local rebels destroyed the office of the Preparatory Bureau for the Establishment of the Tawu County and burned down the Catholic church in the town. They also captured Preparatory Commissioner Yang Zonghan and the French Catholic priest and kept them as captives in the Nyintso monastery.⁵¹ The "campaign to expel the Chinese" was believed to respond to the thirteenth Dalai Lama's call to expel the Chinese from Central Tibet and other Tibetan regions. As a result, the rebellion also affected Chinese residents in the town. The great majority of Chinese residents in Tawu city surrendered to the monastery and avoided being persecuted by paying the latter a fee to spare their lives. Ding refused to surrender; moreover, he successfully withheld joint attacks by the Nyintso monastery and the Yukhok chieftain for over a month.⁵² In late September, Chinese troops from Batang and Sershul (Ser shul) captured the monastery and restored order in Tawu. At the

47 See *Daofu xianzhi*, 1997: 551. Since the Revolution of 1911, the school had stopped recruiting students.

48 Ren Naiqiang, 2009: 407.

49 See *Daofu xianzhi*, 1997: 551.

50 The cause of the rebellion was related to two issues: 1. Nyintso monastery's resentment against the Preparatory Commissioner Yang Zonghan's order to force its monks to resume a family life so as to reduce the number of monks to no more than three hundred; 2. monastic and lay people's grievances against the Catholic Church's infringement of their political, religious and economic interests. See Jiang Lianfu, 1991: 110-1.

51 See *Daofu xianzhi*, 1997: 551; Jiang Lianfu, 1991: 111; Ren Naiqiang, 2009: 408.

52 See *Daofu xianzhi*, 1997: 551; Jiang Lianfu, 1991: 111; Ren Naiqiang, 2009: 408.

time, Ding was entrusted with dealing with the aftermath of the rebellion; it was believed that he became richer as he seized valuable goods and grain from the Nyintso monastery after the monks fled.⁵³ In 1912, he was again authorized to offer amnesty and enlist the rebels of another rebellion launched by Tibetans in Geshitsa (Dge shis rtsa) and Kardze (Dkar mdzes).⁵⁴

We might ask why Ding was placed in charge of local affairs in Tawu in the first place. The chief reason is that powerful local gentry were in control of local affairs. At that time, Chinese troops were preoccupied with suppressing many rebellions in Kham and most Chinese officials had abandoned their positions and fled. In addition to this, it was said that whenever there were disputes among local Tibetans, they would often ask Ding to mediate and settle the disputes. Thus, he was recognized as if he were an indigenous leader in the region. He appears to have been the only Han Chinese merchant in northern Kham to have enjoyed such qualifications.⁵⁵ Ding derived power not only from his formal position. He also managed to gain an important position in the secret society known as the *Gelao* Secret Society (哥老会), popularly known as *paoge* (Gowned Brotherhood 袍哥). Chinese merchants in the nomadic areas attached great importance to *paoge* affiliation. As a renowned member of the Gowned Brotherhood, Ding enjoyed great popular trust among Chinese merchants.⁵⁶ Ding indeed served the local Chinese community well with his foresight and courage. Since 1912, Ding's power was believed to have been on par with the Chinese magistrate. After having witnessed a few Tibetan rebellions in the region, Ding realized that the Chinese migrant community would not be able to defend themselves without armed forces. He persuaded the Chinese to raise funds to form a Chinese militia for self-defense; he even served as *baozheng* (headman 保正) and later as the commander of this militia.⁵⁷ Thus, in 1933 he served as the chief of the Public Security Bureau, and in the next year he became the general deputy commander of the Public Security Brigade in Tawu.⁵⁸

Similar to the Shaanxi merchants discussed above, Ding was an agent of change who introduced new ideas and new things to the Tawu region. In 1913, he served as the superintendent in charge of building a Chinese-style government office. In the same year, he also raised funds to establish a modern clinic. In 1915, he was authorized by the local Chinese government to set up an agricultural experimental farm introducing better seeds and a few new types of fruit trees such as crabapples, apples, walnuts, mulberries, etc. Again in 1920, he

53 Ren Naiqiang, 2009: 408.

54 *Daofu xianzhi*, 1997: 551.

55 Ren Naiqiang, 2009: 408.

56 See Ren Naiqiang, 2009: 408.

57 See *Daofu xianzhi*, 1997: 551.

58 See *Daofu xianzhi*, 1997: 551.

became instrumental in initiating modern education in Tawu when he served as the educational inspector (*Duxue* 督学). Furthermore, in 1925 he advocated cultivation of the rapeseed plant and raised funds to set up an associated oil mill. In the same year, he also mobilized Han Chinese people in Tawu to establish a Chinese Buddhist monastery with a unique gate combining Chinese and Tibetan styles. It happened that master Dayong (大勇), a prominent Chinese monk dispatched by the Nationalist government to pursue further study in Buddhism in Lhasa, traveled through the town of Tawu. Ding and others invited the master to spend a few days at the newly established monastery, where the master expounded Buddhist texts.⁵⁹

Tibetan Merchant Groups

Unlike the Chinese merchants, most Tibetan merchants who dominated the frontier trade were not identifiable as individuals — even though they controlled a huge amount of wealth and trade. Tibetan merchants were largely characterized as agents for big monastic trading firms or worked as trade agents for the powerful chieftains and headmen of Kham. Based on the sources of their capital and their roles in the Sino-Tibetan trade, Tibetan merchants could be sorted into four major groups.

The first category is by far the most important in any discussion of categories of Tibetan traders. This group includes the *tsongpon* (*tshong dpon*) monastery merchants (*simiaoshang* 寺庙商).⁶⁰ *Tsongpon* handled trade and economic matters for hundreds of monasteries large and small.⁶¹ The most notable and wealthiest of these monastic trading firms was Dargye (Dar rgyas) monastery who controlled the importation of all sorts of goods within Kham and far beyond into the Central Tibet. They worked as a team and individual positions constantly change. As a result, the particulars of their dealings were not well documented in available sources. They were more collectively known as *tsongpon* (traders) of the Dargye monastery.

The second category includes the *datouren shang* (major headmen buyers 大头人商). This group represented the scores of semi-independent rulers — local chieftains (*tusi* 土司)

59 See *Daofu xianzhi*, 1997: 551.

60 The highly prized position of *tsongpon* rotated every two years. This was because a successful monastery trader could become rich in addition to providing for the monastery. Wu Jiyuan, 1995: 34, 35.

61 Before 1950, Dartsedo county alone had thirty-six monasteries comprised of all sects, in which there was a total of 2,770 monks and lamas. Four sites had more than two hundred monks; fourteen had between one hundred and two hundred monks; and eighteen monasteries had fewer than fifty monks. *Kangding xianzhi*, 1995, 444. Both Hosie and Rockhill confirmed that these monasteries had lama-agents living more or less permanently in Dartsnedo, who looked after commissary supplies — tea, salt, rice, butter, meat, etc. — and other products. See Alexander Hosie (1905: 79); and W.W. Rockhill, 1891: 284.

and headmen — in Kham and Amdo (A mdo) who lived in the border regions, but also deeper within Kham. These trader-managers handled negotiations and dealt in large volumes of *tuyin cha* (tea designated for the *tusi*, i.e., the indigenous leaders 土引茶).⁶²

The third group of traders from Kham and Central Tibet includes rich private merchants, often from aristocratic families. Three such families were the Pangdatsang (*Spang mda' tshang*) from the Chamdo area, the Sandutsang (*Sa 'du tshang*) from Kardze, and the Tsarongsang (*Tsha rong tshang*) from Central Tibet.⁶³ And the last category of Tibetan traders occupied a unique position in the Sino-Tibetan trade. These were *guozhuang* trading houses in Dartsendo.

In this paper we look at a representative private trader's family, the Pangdatsang. In particular we will examine how their introduction of new and revolutionary ideas effectively made them agents of change.

The Pangda Family

Among private Tibetan traders, the Pangda family, known as Pangdatsang in Tibetan, is the most famous and the best documented.⁶⁴ Based in Markham (Smar khams), this family were described by Western travelers as the "Rockefellers of Tibet." The position of the family in the first half of the twentieth century is legendary in Tibetan society. A common saying, "Sa spang mda' gnam spang mda'," meaning "The earth is Pangda's, the sky is Pangda's" was prevalent throughout Kham. This saying vividly shows the enormous influence the family had in Tibetan areas. As Carole McGranahan rightly points out, the Pangda family was part of the new merchant class — national in category, but dominated by trading families from Kham — that emerged along with important twentieth-century Tibetan experiments with modern ideas, products, and institutions. "As financial power — the important patronage of powerful religious and/or social figures — began to earn these families social status, a modern bourgeois, a middle class was formed. Of this group, eventually two Khampa families were granted the aristocratic rank: The Sadhutsang (Sandutsang) family and the Pangdatsang family."⁶⁵

The family initially came to prominence in the mid-nineteenth century through marriage

62 Li Shaoming (2004: 6). For a detailed discussion of yin licenses for brick tea sold in Tibetan regions, refer to Patrick Ramzi Booz, 2011: 179-183.

63 See Meilang Zongzhen (Smon lam brtson 'grus), 2009: 71.

64 There are two different spellings and pronunciations of the Pangda family: Spang mda' (Pangda) and Spom mda' (Pomda). In Kham dialect, the pronunciation of *pangda* sounds like *pomda*, which may explain the emergence of two different spellings. According to Melvyn Goldstein and Carole McGranahan, family members themselves prefer Pangda, thus, throughout this article, I use this spelling.

65 Carole McGranahan, 2005 (15.1): 259.

alliance with the religious family of Sakya (Sa skya). The Sakya family and the sect was connected with Chamdo region. As a result of the marriage alliance, the Pangda family was awarded a hereditary post. Thus, as the chief of Gyake (Rgya skeg) or Gyakar (Rgya dkar), one of the eighteen chiefs in Markham, they resettled in the region.⁶⁶ The new position in Markham made it possible for the family to expand via trade. Pangda Nyigyel (Spang mda' nyi rgyal),⁶⁷ a descendant of the Pangda-Sakya alliance, rose to become one of the major traders in Chamdo.⁶⁸ Eventually he moved to Lhasa to coordinate the family's long-distance trade.⁶⁹ Pangda Nyigyel's move to Lhasa greatly benefited the growth of his business. Not only was this due to his business acumen, he was a rich benefactor to the three great monasteries, i.e., Sera (Se ra), Ganden (Dga' ldan) and Drepung ('Bras spungs);⁷⁰ moreover, he won the trust of major religious leaders and the thirteenth Dalai Lama. This relationship resulted in favorable government wool-purchasing privileges in 1909 – a monopoly of a portion of the trade (e.g., two thirds to Pangda and one third to other traders);⁷¹ providing assistance to the Dalai Lama during the latter's exile in British India from 1910-1913 led to further privileges.⁷² In particular, the thirteenth Dalai Lama appointed Pangda Nyigyel as the trade agent for the Kashak government.⁷³ By 1920, Pangda Nyigyel was the leading Tibetan trader, with representatives in China and India as well as various Tibetan regions.⁷⁴ In 1921, Pangda Nyigyel was assassinated in Lhasa, and his murder had never been solved. Nevertheless, capable members of the next generation of the Pangda family took over their father's enterprise.

The close association with the thirteenth Dalai Lama and his chief favorite Tubten Kumbé (la) (Thub bstan kun 'phel) that Pangda Nyigyel established continued after his death. The Pangda family was headed by Nyigyel's eldest son, Pangda Nyima (Spang mda' nyi ma), who

66 Carole McGranahan, 2002: 106-107.

67 His full name is Pangda Nyima Gyeltsen, but he was commonly known by his abbreviated name Pangda Nyigyel.

68 Meilang Zongzhen (Smon lam brtson 'grus), 2005: 50.

69 Carole McGranahan, 2002: 106-7.

70 Carole McGranahan, 2002: 111-2.

71 See IOR/L/P/+S/10/138 Tibet. Trade Monopolies, 1909-1918. In addition, the grant of hide went to the Getutsang family from Kham for Rs. 20,000/per year, cited from Carole McGranahan, 2002: 112 ; *Xizang de shangye yu shougongye diaocha yanjiu*, 2000: 197.

72 For details about the story of Pangda Nyigyel, refer to Carole McGranahan, 2002: 103-24; Meilang Zongzhen (Smon lam brtson 'grus), 2005: 50-55.

73 It was also said that the Dalai Lama entrusted the family to handle grain taxes of Central Tibet and to provide financial and banking services to the common people. See *Shizang jicheng*, *Lasa jianwenji*, *Xizang jiyao*, 1991: 145, 279-80.

74 See *Xizang de shangye yu shougongye diaocha yanjiu*, 2000: 10.

was the half-brother of other brothers and in his late thirties.⁷⁵ The maintenance of this close association ensured that the trading power as well as the political and social influence of the family continued to grow. Following the assassination of Nyigyel, the Dalai Lama had great sympathy for the family, and gave Nyima the title of *letsenpa* (*las tshan pa*), sixth rank, and continued to grant the family various trade recessions.⁷⁶ The awarding of rank, which carried hereditary status, to the Pangda family marked the first time that an "ordinary" Tibetan family was admitted to aristocratic ranks; they earned this partly because of family wealth accumulated through trade and their loyalty to the Dalai Lama and partly because of their talents.⁷⁷ In 1930 Nyima requested the Dalai Lama's permission to allow him to retire and to turn the business over to Pangda Yangpel (Spang mda' g.yang 'phel; Luo Shaoting). The Dalai Lama refused to do so; instead, he raised the status of the Pangda even higher by granting the Pangda firm exclusive government agency to buy wool,⁷⁸ effective as of March 1, 1930.⁷⁹ As the price for wool and transport fell lower than ever before, the monopoly was cancelled on February 25, 1933.⁸⁰ By this time Pangda Nyima had retired and became a monk.⁸¹ Yangpel became the head of the Pangda family, and the status of the family continued to grow due to his good business acumen combined with connections to important religious and political figures.⁸²

In 1940, Pangda Yamphel was given the rank of *rimzhi* (*rim bzhi*), or fourth level aristocratic ranking, which included the post of Tibetan Trade Agent in Yatung (Gro mo), and

75 Pangda Nyigyel first married the eldest daughter of the Drongmé (Grong smad) family at the Lhadun (Lha mdun; Nandun 南墩, Yirandui) village in Markham, and had a son called Pangda Nyima. Later he married Yangjan Drolma (G. yangs can sgrol ma), the second daughter of the Drongmé (Grong smad) family, and had four children, i.e., the three sons known as the Three Pangda brothers and a daughter called Pangda Chimé (Spang mda' 'chi med). See Meilang Zongzhen (Smon lam brtson 'grus), 2013: 137-44.

76 See McGranahan, 15.1 (2005): 260. The information about Pangda Nyima is very spotty in Goldstein's account of the Pangdatsang rebellion in 1934, which reads as follows: "Nyima, the head of the family, was a favorite of the thirteenth Dalai Lama, and had been sent by him on a number of unofficial missions." See Melvyn Goldstein, 1989: 177.

77 Of other Khampas who belonged to the aristocracy, one was the younger brother of the Derge (Sde dge) royal family — the Derge se Ngakwang Jampel Rinchen (Sde dge sras ngag dbang 'jam dpal rin chen), and the others were families in which a Dalai Lama was discovered, an event that carried with it immediate entry into aristocratic society at the yapzhi (*yab gzhis*), or the highest level.

78 See IOR/L/P+S/10/1088, Weir to Foreign Secretary, Government of India, 6 August 1930, cited from McGranahan, 2005: 260 fn.16.

79 See IOR/L/P+S/12/4163 Tibet, Trade, cited from McGranahan, 2005: 260 fn.17.

80 See IOR/L/P+S/12/4166, cited from McGranahan, 2005: 261 fn.21.

81 See Carole McGranahan, 2005 (15.1): 261.

82 See Carole McGranahan, 2005 (15.1): 261.

the title of Dromo Chichap (*Gro mo spyi khyab*).⁸³ This post, equivalent to Governor of the Chumbi (Chu bed) Valley, was one that Yamphel specifically requested. This status allowed him to fully control trade between India and Tibet, including levying and collecting taxes, and creating and lifting various trade restrictions.

The Pangda family occupied incongruent and shifting positions within the politics of China, Central Tibet, and Kham. As will be evident in the following discussion, while some members of Pangdatsang families held positions as officials in the Lhasa government or as *Kuomintang* officials, at the same time members of Pangdatsang families were active as revolutionaries opposing both the Kashak government and *Kuomintang*. The Pangda brothers were one of the few Khampa merchants who traveled beyond their home regions. Their extensive travels brought them back and forth between India, China, Kham, and Lhasa. This allowed them to witness and imbibe the social transformations that unfolded in the early part of the twentieth century. These experiences provided them with a cosmopolitan view of the world, one probably influenced by other Asian thinkers and activists. Thus, the family acted as agents and conveyors of new ideas and introduced new objects and goods in Tibet. Here, I will focus on the significant role of the Pangda family as an agent of change by introducing new and revolutionary ideas.

In addition to trade and economy discussed above, the Pangda family exerted great influence and introduced many new ideas in the field of politics. Along with its growing trading power as well as rising social and political status, the Pangda family became active in both local Kham politics and the larger politics of Sino-Tibetan relations. After the death of the thirteenth Dalai Lama in 1933, Central Tibet was in a state of political unrest, economic recession and critical social conflicts. In particular, after Pangda Topgye (Spang mda' stobs rgyas) and Pangda Rapga (Spang mda' rab dga') led an armed revolt against the Kashak government in 1934, members of the Pangda family began to adopt different political approaches to deal with the situation.

The 1934 Revolt in Kham

Pangda Topgye was a great friend of the Dalai Lama's favored attendant Tubten Kumbe (la). After the thirteenth Dalai Lama passed in 1933, he was perturbed by Kumbe (la)'s fall from

83 In this post, Pangda was the first Tibetan government official that foreigners would meet. Lowell Thomas Jr. (1950: 77) writes about his meeting with "the Tromo Trochi of Dhomu" and states that he was an "impressive man." On an undercover US Government mission to Tibet, Ilya Tolstoy and Brooke Dolan also met with Pangda Yamphel in Dromo, and are said to have been "charmed" by him. See John Kenneth Knaus, 1999: 7.

power. It was also rumored that his brother Pangda Yangpel was at risk of being arrested.⁸⁴ Certain that Central Tibetan officials would never treat Khampas fairly, Pangda Topgye had long advocated self-rule among the local leaders.⁸⁵ Thus, in the beginning of 1934 he, together with his brother Pangda Rapga, called on all Khampas "to join together and take control of our own territory,"⁸⁶ and rebel against the Kashak government. They proposed "the Eight-point Political Program," demanding regional autonomy, eventual control of Kham by Khampas themselves, equality for all nationalities, abolishment of the feudal hereditary noble system, and resisting the invasion of Western colonial forces.⁸⁷ The content of "the Eight-point Political Program" looks strikingly similar to five policies proposed to the Nationalist government by Kelzang Tsering (Bskal bzang tshe ring).⁸⁸ The revolt was soon suppressed and never allowed to develop into a general rebellion in Kham. Consequently, the Pangda brothers went into exile in Pome (Spo smad),⁸⁹ Batang.

Even while in exile, the Pangda maintained their family home and power in Kham.⁹⁰ From Lhasa, Yangpel sent them money, arms, and ammunitions via Khampa traders.⁹¹ Though initially the Kashak government sealed the family's branch firm in Lhasa, and arrested Yangpel, yet, because of the family's wealth and its wide social, religious and political network, the family was spared from the actual punishment. More importantly, the Kashak government was afraid of losing its assets controlled by the Pangda firm.⁹² Since then, the two Pangda brothers chose to continue to see the Kashak government as feudal and outdated in need of reforms, though each of them had different views on how to go about effecting changes, as well as what sort of changes they were striving for.

84 Melvyn C. Goldstein, 1989: 178.

85 See Melvyn C. Goldstein, 1989: 179. In addition, it was said that he accidentally intercepted the Kashak government's letter that suspected him and gave the order to Tibetan troops to check him. When he was appointed to be the commissioner of Markham and Drayap (Brag g.yab), he felt that he was left out of the group and that the Lhasa officers discriminated against him. In his view, he was temporarily the cat's paw for the Kashak government when he was upgraded to be the *rupon* (*ru dpon*), and his promotion was a result of the government's political need to strengthen its defenses in various counties in Chamdo in response to the military conflict between Central Tibetan government and Chinese troops in Kham. See Meilang Zongzhen (Smon lam brtson 'grus), 2005: 15-21.

86 Melvyn C. Goldstein, 1989: 180.

87 See Zhongmai Gesang Zhaxi (Grong smad bskaI bzang bkra shis), 2001: 113.

88 Kelzang Tsering was a Chinese educated Khampa official who worked in the Nationalist government organs that promulgated Tibetan policies. He was responsible for initiating the movement for Khampa rule of Kham, in 1932. See Deng Junkang and Li Kunbi, 1997: 142.

89 It is also known as Pokhok (Spo khog).

90 See Zhongmai Gesang Zhaxi (Drong smad bskaI bzang bkra shis), 1999: 23-35.

91 See Carole McGranahan, 2005 (15.1): 263.

92 See Li Guangwen, et al (2000: 165). For details about how the Kashak government dealt with Pangda Yangpel and the family's firm in Lhasa, refer to Melvyn C. Goldstein (1989: 180-185).

The "Khampa Rule of Kham" Movement

Pangda Topgye promoted self-government of Kham, he had been exploring new political ideas of governance in home region. During the period from 1935 through the mid-1940s when Topgye was active in the politics of Kham, "Kham was the site for numerous political and military battles, most small scale involving some combination of local Tibetan troops, Communist troops, Kuomintang troops and the troops of Liu Wenhui (刘文辉), governor of Xikang."⁹³ Indeed, Topgye was intimately involved in many of afore-mentioned battles. During his exile in Batang, Topgye had adopted pluralistic political lines by actively catering to various political forces. In the period of 1934-1935, to achieve his ultimate goal of ridding Kham of the influence and power of the Kashak government and realizing his ideal of the "Khampa rule for Kham" movement, Topgye consolidated his position in Batang by establishing good relations and co-existing peacefully with the Chinese troops stationed in Batang of the No. 24 army under the control of the Sichuan warlord Liu Wenhui. At the same time, he also went to Nanjing in 1934 and actively sought to establish a relationship with the Nationalist government. His trip to Nanjing made it possible for him to be actively involved in one of the major political and military battles involving many Khampa elite — "the Khampa rule of Kham" movement launched by the Gara Lama Sonam Raptan (Sgar ra bla ma bsod rnam rab brtan) from the Riwoche (Ri bo che) monastery again.

In Nanjing, Topgye met the Gara Lama, also known as Norla Hutuktu (Nor bla ho thog thu),⁹⁴ who was a like-minded Khampa religious leader in exile there. They both maintained an anti-Lhasa stance; their main objective was to drive Lhasa troops out of Kham so that they could return home. The passing of the Red Army through Kham during their Long March in 1935 provided them an opportunity to return to Kham. To weaken Liu Wenhui's influence in Kham and to block the advance of the Red Army,⁹⁵ in May 1935 Chiang Kai-shek dispatched the Gara Lama as the "Pacification Commissioner of Xikang" (*Xikang xuanweishi* 西康宣慰使) to muster militia in Kham. In the commissioner's office that he established, Topgye served as the director of the Pacification Team and concurrently served as the head of the Local Armed Forces.⁹⁶ In August the Office of the Pacification Commissioner held a plenary pacification session in Dartsendo, attended by several hundred representatives, including most powerful

93 McGranahan, 2005: 265.

94 Li Guo and Xirao Nima (Shes rab nyi ma) insist that the title should be written as nub bla (lit., the "lama of the west"), instead of nor bla, (lit., the "lama of wealth"). See Li Guo and Xirao Nima (Shes rab nyi ma), 2008: 15-9.

95 See Zhao Xinyu, et al., 2005: 525-6.

96 See Feng Youzhi, 1988: 12; Jiang Anxi et al., 1983: 64-77; Jiang Anxi, et al., 1982: 108-22; Zhongmai Gesang Zhaxi (Grong smad bskal bzang bkra shis), 1999: 23-35.

chiefs and headmen as well as influential religious leaders in Kham.⁹⁷ In the assembly, the Gara Lama again proposed the idea of "Khampa rule of Kham" and "autonomy for Kham." The lama's idea was enthusiastically embraced by Pangda Topgye, the powerful Derge minister Jago Topden (Bya rgod stobs ldan), the influential headman in Kardze Dondrup Namgyel (Don grub rnam rgyal; also known as Deng Dejie 邓德杰) and others. They supported the Lama's effort to disarm the Chinese forces of No. 24 army stationed in Kham. In particular, in the end of 1935 Pangda Topgye was dispatched to disarm a battalion of the No. 24 Army commanded by Fu Dequan (付德铨), but failed.⁹⁸

Meanwhile, based on the idea of "Khampa rule of Kham," the Gara Lama, together with Pangda Topgye, Jago Topden, and Dondrup Namgyel secretly formed a political group known as *tumpa punzhi* (*mtshun pa spun bzhi*; Four Harmonious Friends) to work towards Khampa unification by settling internal differences in Kham.⁹⁹ The "Khampa rule of Kham" movement and the "Four Harmonious Friends" grew out of the same source; yet, each had its own unique features. Generated out of the global discourse of "self-determination" and "self-rule" — albeit novel and "derivative" as Peng Wenbin rightly points out¹⁰⁰ — that resonated globally during the first half of the twentieth century, the "Khampa rule of Kham" movement was considered to be the product of nationalist thinking in Asia. Adopting Sun Yat-sen's "Three Principles of People" and his nationalist liberation ideology, leaders of the "Khampa rule of Kham" movement applied it to their own localities, Kham, so as to liberate Kham from outside oppression.¹⁰¹ Though it was based on the idea of "Khampa rule of Kham," the political group "Four Harmonious Friends" was different from the former in many ways. Above all, the group paid more attention to the sufferings and hardships of the Khampas. The group was not only opposed to the Kashak government's levying extremely onerous ulag transportation services, but also was against the oppressions of the Khampas by traditional Tibetan chieftains and Chinese warlords. Furthermore, the purpose of establishing this group was to guarantee there would be no large-scale armed fighting in Kham and to ensure unity and peace of the region.

The untimely death of the Gara Lama cast a shadow on the objective of the "Khampa rule of Kham" movement. When the Lama led his followers to block the advance of the Fourth Front Red Army to Kardze and Drango (Brag 'go) in May 1936, he was captured by the Red

97 For details about the participants in the assembly, see Jiang Anxi et al. 1983: 65.

98 See Jiang Anxi et al., 1983: 65.

99 This group would gather in different parts of Kham and have parties with all sorts of activities...The symbol of the group was the "Four Harmonious Friends" — the elephant, monkey, rabbit, and bird — a symbol of friendship and unity.

100 See Peng Wenbin, 2002: 78.

101 In particular, their leaders looked to the Nationalists for support, not only because of their antagonism toward the Kashak government and the Chinese warlord Liu Wenhui, but also because, at least at a rhetorical level, the Nationalists championed the cause of national equality and social improvement.

Army and died of an illness while in captivity. Pangda Topgye and Jago Topden were also captives of the Red Army in Kardze at the time, but they were persuaded to join the Bopa Peoples' Republic's central government established under the guidance of the Red Army. While Pangda Topgye was elected to be the director of the Department of Finance, Jago Topden was elected to be the head of the Department of Military Affairs.¹⁰² Nevertheless, Pangda Topgye and Jago Topden continued to promote the idea of "Khampa rule of Kham."

Meanwhile, Pangda Topgye understood perfectly well that having a strong material foundation was indispensable for realizing "Khampa rule of Kham." Thus, he astutely seized the opportunity to engage in trade and commerce between inland China and Central Tibet as soon as he stationed his troops in Pome in 1937.¹⁰³ In 1939, Pangda Topgye, together with his brother Yangpel, opened the overland-transportation lines that completely relied on mules and ran from India to Sichuan and Yunnan via Central Tibet; they continuously transported much needed materials for the great rear area of the Anti-Japanese War. They profited greatly from this business. Furthermore, The Pangda family's reconciliation with the interim Tibetan government by November 1940 also enabled the family to make even more money. Furthermore, in 1942, he was also invited to join "Kham Tibetan Tea Ltd.," established by Kelzang Yeshe and Liu Wenhui; he established a branch firm in Litang.¹⁰⁴

While making money to support his "Khampa rule of Kham" movement, throughout the late 1930s and 1940s, Topgye remained continuously devoted to promoting the movement's ideas. After moving back to live in Pome, in the summer of 1937, Batang formed bonds with chieftains and headmen in northern and southern Kham. In 1939, he convened the meeting of these major chieftains and headmen in Drodok (Gro mdog) village of Chatreng (Phyag phreng, Xiangcheng 乡城), whose mission was to realize the goal of "Khampa rule of Kham" through the concerted efforts and unity among various headmen in Kham.¹⁰⁵ In 1941, he further expanded the political group "Four Harmonious Friends" by recruiting more Khampa leaders;

102 *Zhonggong Ganzi zhouwei zuzhibu, Zhongguo Gongchandang Sichuan sheng Ganzi zangzu zizhizhou zuzhishi ziliao*, 1991:16-7.

103 Since there were no direct business dealings between the Kashak government and the Nationalist central government since the passing of the thirteenth Dalai Lama in 1933, Topgye knew that his business would be profitable.

104 Again Topgye's actions in the subsequent years showed clearly that he was indeed more open to "expediency," as he had apparently reconciled with Liu Wenhui's officers and Liu Wenhui himself. Though merely two years ago Topgye fought against the Chinese officer Fu Dequan stationed in Batang, yet in 1937 he purchased the land in Pome from Fu. In the same year, he also served as the deputy commander of the militia of No. 5 District under the Preparatory Committee for the Establishment of Xikang Province, concurrently holding the position of the commander of the Calvary. Then, in 1939 He became the deputy commander of the Public Security Force of No. 5 District of Xikang Province and the commander of cavalry regiment. Furthermore, with the support of Liu Wenhui, Topgye established a branch firm in Dartsendo in 1940, and engaged in trading in large scale. See Meilang Zongzhen (Smon lam brtson 'grus), 2009 (1): 74-5.

105 See Meilang Zongzhen (Smon lam brtson 'grus), 2009 (1): 73-4.

in 1949, together with the Batang trader Kelsang Yeshe (Bskal bzang ye shes) and others, he established the "Association for the Promotion of Autonomy of Kham and Tibet" (*Kangzang zizhi cujinhui* 康藏自治促进会) in Dartsendo to win over chieftains and headmen in Kham.¹⁰⁶

Pangda Rapga and the Tibet Improvement Party

Similarly, Rapga was also active in the political events of the day, introducing new ideas as agent of change. During Rapga's travels back and forth from Kham to China and India following the revolt, it was believed that he had schemed with both Chinese and Indian nationalists to try to envision a modern Tibet. His initial contact with the officials of the Nationalist government was during this trip to Chongqing (重庆) in 1935, where he was said to have had an interview with Chiang Kai-shek (蒋介石). This association resulted in his employment by the Commission of Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs (*Mengzang weiyuanhui* 蒙藏委员会) in Nanjing (Nanking 南京).¹⁰⁷ Over the course of the next ten years, he provided a great amount of information concerning Tibetan elite in Central Tibet and British activities there.¹⁰⁸ In 1936 he left for Kalimpong, where he met Indian nationalists, and in 1938 he went to Chongqing, where he served as the commissioner for the Commission of Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs.

Desiring for Tibet the changes he saw taking form in China and India, in 1939 Rapga led a group of progressive-minded Tibetans, including the aristocratic poet Changlochen (Lcang lo can) and the former favorite of the thirteenth Dalai Lama Kumbe (la), in forming a political party known as Tibet Improvement Party (*Nub bod legs bcos skyid sdug*) in Kalimpong. This party aimed at reforming the Kashak government along the lines of the Nationalist China. The party considered the Kashak government entirely outdated, religious, and feudal, and sought a more modern secular representative government. The new government would pay attention to improving infrastructure, such as the introduction of more advanced technology, better education, and a modern standing army. The ultimate goal of the party regarding the

106 After the liberation, Pangda Topgye had served as a representative of the First, Second and Third National People's Congress, and he became the deputy director and director of the People's Liberation Committee of Chamdo. Later, he was the deputy secretary of the Preparatory Committee for the Establishment of Tibet Autonomous Region, and he became the vice chairman of Tibetan Autonomous Regional Political Consultative Conference. See "Xizang zuida shanghao 'bangdacang' de houren," Xinhuanet, 2002-04-26. <http://news.xinhuanet.com>).

107 Chen Qianping, 2002 (3): 89.

108 Since the relevant archival documents are not yet open to the public, we can probably confirm that he had provided a great deal of information based on the relevant entries in *Zhongguo di-er lishi dang'an guan suocun Xizang he zangshi dang'an mulu*, 2000.

future of Tibet was that Tibet would become an autonomous republic within the Republic of China.¹⁰⁹ In particular, the party wanted to reform the monastic system, desiring in its place a public education system to exist within, or alongside the monasteries so as to create a literate public.¹¹⁰ In view of his status as the secular Tibetan intellectual, theorist, and political schemer among the brothers,¹¹¹ it is no wonder that Rapga did draw on new ideas from China, India, and beyond in seeking for possible solutions to effect change in Central Tibet and Kham. The reason Rapga intended to reform the Kashak government along the lines of Kuomintang is that he was deeply attracted to Sun Yat-sen's call for modernization of China and his "Three Principles of People" (*sanmin zhuyi* 三民主义). In fact, he not only translated the pamphlet entitled "The Three Principles of People" by Sun Yat-sen into Tibetan in 1942, he also paid for the publication and distribution of copies of the pamphlet.¹¹² Rapga's revolutionary ideas were also generated out of the global discourse of modernity on the nation. His ideas for reform were derived from the standard platform of the modern as interpreted in Asia with emphases on education and literacy, on public culture, on a desire for economic sufficiency, and for a modern, independent government beholden neither to Europeans or regional overlords.¹¹³ But his career as a revolutionary ended when the British government of India deported him for his endeavor in 1946, and he went back to work in Nanjing.¹¹⁴

Conclusion

The emergent position of merchants like the Shaanxi merchants, Ding Zhenghua and Pangtatsang is reflective of social transformation in the frontier region prompted by state sponsored migration projects coupled with opening the frontier for trade. During the Republican period, the Kham region became a contested, in-between space with a host of political, cultural, and economic complexities; yet, it was also a region where trade, commerce, and exchange of ideas was rather active. These merchants, either Tibetan or Chinese, were

109 See Melvyn C. Goldstein, 1989: 450.

110 See McGranahan, 2005: 255.

111 See McGranahan, 2005: 259.

112 The Chinese archival document shows that he translated the pamphlet from English into Tibetan. See "Bangda Raogan wei qingzhun zuzhi Xizang gemingdang deng shiyi zhi Wu Zhongxin cheng," Sept. 29, 1942, in the Nationalist Archives collected in National History Academy of Taipei, cited from Chen Qianping, 2002(3): 89.

113 McGranahan, 2005: 270.

114 Rapga soon left Tibet for India. He was involved in initial plans for Tibetan resistance to the Chinese from India, offering Pangdatsang family troops and a plan for the resistance to operate out of India's Northeast Frontier. See Carole McGranahan, 2005 (15.1): 253-74

quick to grasp opportunities afforded by the political changes. By doing so, they became local agents and purveyors of ideas and facilitators of nation-building objectives. The involvement of the merchant class was key to promoting stable, centralized authority in Kham region; this stability would facilitate greater trade and security for trade afforded by the establishment of the administrative rule.

The above-stories of the emergence of the merchant class in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century illustrate the precarious and unstable character of the frontier region. The merchant class, comprised of both Chinese and Tibetans, became significant players in the politics of the Kham region. They often affiliated with emerging political powers to strengthen their own trading advantages. Since the main purpose for traders (i.e., Shaanxi traders, Ding Zhenghua and the Pangda family) was to make a profit through commercial activities, a stratum of these traders tended to be aligned with the centralize authorities who were instrumental in creating favorable conditions for trade and commerce. As shown above, as long as these traders could make money, they would cross ethnic lines and move beyond political differences; this meant they would co-operate and communicate with parties that were economically, socially, politically, and culturally different in Kham, Central Tibet, and inland China. By doing so, their activities formed various links and networks that extended through intermarriage and cooperation among traders of different ethnic groups in the Kham region. Furthermore, though some Chinese traders such as Shaanxi merchants had penetrated deeply into the Kham region, Chinese, Tibetan, and Hui traders could still provide complementary, non-replicable services. Thus, each group found its own niche in the trade and commerce of the Kham region. The goods and new ideas they brought into the region made them agents of change and directly facilitated the expansion of trade and commerce in the region.

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