



## Awe and Submission: A Tibetan Aristocrat at the Court of Qianlong

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Awe and Submission:  
A Tibetan Aristocrat at the Court of Qianlong

OF ALL THE questions one might ask about the nature of the Qing state, the question of Tibet's place within it is one of the most politically sensitive. Given the argument about the status of present-day Tibet, discussion of Tibet's status during the Qing is as political as it is scholarly. Whereas China has insisted for some time that, before any further diplomatic contact can take place, the Dalai Lama must affirm that Tibet has been for centuries an 'integral part' of China, the Dalai Lama, although willing to accept Tibet's integration into the People's Republic of China, will not deny Tibet's historical independence. Given that both sides are ostensibly seeking to resolve the question of Tibet's present and future place within the PRC, the ability of an historical argument to end discussions highlights the diplomatic impact that issues such as Tibet's position within the Qing empire continue to play.

Qing expansion into Tibet followed a pattern common among empires in which unforeseen security concerns precipitate unintended expansion in response to crisis. The events leading up to the first Qing entry into Tibet in 1720, in response to the Zunghar Mongol occupation of Lhasa, are well known, as are the subsequent Qing actions arising out of their wariness and suspicion of the Zunghars' designs on Tibet and worries about the volatility of the Sino-Tibetan frontier. The process by which Tibet fell under Qing domination, however, was gradual. Qing forces were stationed in Tibet after the expulsion of the Zunghars from Lhasa; although the garrison of Lhasa was withdrawn in 1723, it was re-established in late 1728 following serious internal fighting in Tibet. In 1733, the 2,000 troops were reduced to 500, then raised again to 1,500 in 1751, following a Qing expedition to Lhasa which put an end to intrigues among the Zunghars and Tibet's civil 'king'. All of these actions presupposed that a secure Tibet had become one of the Qing state's vital interests.

Qing priorities also led to the removal in 1724 and 1725 of large stretches of the Sino-Tibetan frontier from the jurisdiction (admittedly weak in many places) of the Tibetan government. Although these regions were placed under Qing supervision, they did not become provinces. The

Qing, as paramount rulers, often ruled through local rulers and polities.<sup>1</sup> Their practice was paralleled in the events that unfolded at the end of the century on the south side of the Himalayas, where British India was drawn outwards into a diverse array of sensitive frontier areas.

Similar, too, is the manner in which both the British and the Qing consolidated their power in these areas. In both cases, an unexpected military crisis prompted the re-evaluation of existing arrangements, bringing about the final stage that bound the dependency to the imperial power. In British India, the rebellion of 1857 forced the British government to take direct responsibility for rule over India. In Tibet, wars with Nepal from 1789 to 1792 compelled the Qing to send an army, led by the Manchu general Fukangga (Ch. *Fukang'an*), to Tibet to push the Gurkhas back over the Himalayas into the Kathmandu valley. Although the particulars of the rebellion in India are well known,<sup>2</sup> the similar role of the Gurkha wars in the culmination of a process in Tibet that had been unfolding for most of the eighteenth century has been ignored. The outcome was the unequivocal subordination of the Tibetan government to the Qing and the assimilation of Tibet into the Qing empire.

This essay does not explain the degree to which the events leading to the Qing absorption of Tibet mirror imperial expansion elsewhere. Rather, it explains how the circumstances of one Tibetan official, caught up in the Gurkha wars, reveal the nature of the relationship of the Tibetan élite with the Qing throne.

The official in question is Rdo-ring Bstan-'dzin dpal-'byor. Until now, the most extensive account in a Western language of his life and career is Luciano Petech's masterly summary.<sup>3</sup> At the time of the Gurkha wars, Rdo-ring served at the highest level of the Tibetan government: from 1783, he held the rank of minister (*bka'-blon*), and, as such, was one of four officials who constituted the council of ministers – in Tibetan, *bka'-shag* – directly under the Dalai Lama. Scion of a prominent family, Rdo-ring was preceded in this office by his father, Mgon-po Dngos-grub rab-brtan, better known as Paṇḍita (from the title *noyan paṇḍita*) or Rdo-ring Paṇḍita.<sup>4</sup> Beginning in 1788, Rdo-ring played an increasingly prominent role in trying to placate the Gurkhas, who were demanding large payments of silver in return for leaving Tibetan territory unmolested. During a trip to

1 The events of this period have been described in detail by Luciano Petech in the standard work on the subject: Luciano Petech, *China and Tibet in the Early XVIIIth Century* (Leiden, 1972).

2 For the 1857 rebellion see, e.g., the bibliography provided by C. A. Bayly in *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire: The New Cambridge History of India*: II, pt. 1 (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 222-3.

3 Luciano Petech, *Aristocracy and Government in Tibet, 1728-1959* (Rome, 1973).

4 The family was also known by another name, Dga'-bzhi, though Rdo-ring is today the more common appellation; see Petech, *Aristocracy and Government*, pp. 50-64.

the border to make one such payment, he and another *bka'blon*, G.yu-thog Bkra-shis don-grub, were taken prisoner by the Gurkhas and sent to Kathmandu. The incident was followed by a successful Gurkha advance deep into Tibet as far as Gzhis-ka-rtse. The two officials were not released until 1792, after a year in captivity and after Qing troops had invaded Nepal and forced the Gurkhas to surrender on the outskirts of Kathmandu.<sup>1</sup>

Owing to their captivity, Rdo-ring and G.yu-thog fell under a cloud of suspicion, it being believed in some quarters that they were not so much captives as collaborators. Petech remarks that Rdo-ring, after being handed over to the Qing, 'was escorted to Tibet and Fukangga ordered him to be placed under close guard and not allowed to communicate with his family; he was to be sent to Peking later. Actually he did not leave Tibet and was merely subjected to a judicial interrogation.'<sup>2</sup> As for G.yu-thog, according to Petech 'the emperor gave orders that he should be sent to Peking for judgement; we do not know whether the order was actually carried out.'<sup>3</sup>

Since Petech wrote his book, however, Rdo-ring's massive autobiography has become available in two different editions, which allows us to fill in some of the gaps in the materials with which Petech worked.<sup>4</sup> In addition to useful information about Rdo-ring's family and early life, the autobiography contains extensive information about the Gurkha wars and other aspects of eighteenth-century Tibetan politics.<sup>5</sup> It proves that both Rdo-ring and G.yu-thog did, in fact, travel to Beijing to account for their actions and, thus, it allows us to set Rdo-ring's account of his experiences at the court of the Qianlong emperor against the background of the consolidation of Qing rule over Tibet.

That Rdo-ring's story exemplifies the fact of Qing imperialism would be denied in circles that accept the official, modern Chinese claim that

1 The lives of Rdo-ring Bstan-'dzin dpal-'byor and his father are recounted in Petech, *Aristocracy and Government*, pp. 53-9. G.yu-thog Bkra-shis don-grub's life: pp. 129-31. The dates for both of them are uncertain, although the existence of an autobiographical account of Rdo-ring's life allows us to ascertain his date of birth.

2 Petech, *Aristocracy and Government*, p. 58.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 131.

4 Petech notes that Rdo-ring had written an autobiography, inaccessible to him but duly mentioned by Tsepon Shakabpa as one of his sources: *ibid.*, p. 55, citing Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History* (New Haven, 1967), p. 338.

5 Rdo-ring' [Bstan-'dzin dpal-'byor], *Rdo-ring Panḍita'i rnam-thar* (Chengdu, 1986) and *Dga'-bzhi-ba'i mi-rabs-kyi byung-ba brjod-pa zol-med gtam-gyi rol-mo* (Lhasa, 1988). The postscript of the latter dates the composition to 1806. Citations of this work below all refer to the former edition. From the text (pp. 89-90), we learn that Rdo-ring was born in 1760/1761. Prior to the publication of this text, the existence of at least one copy was signalled by the use of selected passages in a Tibetan grammar published in China: Skal-bzang-'gyur-med, *Bod-kyi brda-sprod rig-pa'i khrid-rgyun rab-gsal me-long* (Chengdu, 1983).

Tibet has been an 'integral part' of China since the thirteenth century.<sup>1</sup> However, Rdo-ring's autobiography presents a picture of a Tibetan bureaucracy, staffed by a hereditary aristocracy, being taken in hand (rather than dismantled) by an imperial Qing state that had only recently extended its control over Central Tibet.

\* \* \*

In travelling under escort to China, the two former *bka'blon* – they had lost the rank during their captivity – bypassed Lhasa, travelling by way of Chengdu. Though clearly still under suspicion – they were, after all, the subject of a serious investigation handled, as Rdo-ring informs us, by the grand council (Ch. *Junji chu*; Tib. *Cunci yamen*) – they were treated with a level of respect and dignity that seems at first surprising. In Chengdu, they were fêted by local Tibetan residents, and by Chinese merchants who had visited Tibet, with a day-long banquet and the performance of a Beijing opera.<sup>2</sup> The incongruity between the treatment and the circumstances can only be explained by an imperial policy designed to maintain a weakened but obedient Tibetan bureaucracy. In this case, it meant tempering the reality of captivity with ample signs that Qing rule was imbued with imperial benevolence.

Rdo-ring and G.yu-thog arrived at Beijing late in 1792, where they were questioned about the Gurkha wars by officials of the grand council, assisted by a translator. In Beijing, they were something of a curiosity: their appearance elicited a reaction redolent of empire confronting the exotic within its dominions. The comments on their appearance hint at the court's attitude towards the place of Tibet in the Qing empire. As Rdo-ring explains:

1 PRC authors have been either unable or unwilling to point to an actual act or decree that specifically designated Tibet 'an integral part of China'. Thus, Chinese publications exhibit an inability to agree on the date on which Tibet became a part of China: *Beijing Review*, Feb. 1988, dates it to 1264; an article in *Social Sciences in China* (1984) dates it to Sa-skya paṅḍita's trip to Köden's court; and the 'white paper' published by the Information Office of the State Council of the PRC in *Beijing Review*, Sept.-Oct. 1992, vaguely dates it to after the establishment of the Yuan central government (the same document dates the establishment of centralized Yuan rule to 1279). Evidently, the event on which modern Chinese writers base China's claim to Tibet never registered among Yuan annalists and historiographers. The modern origins of the claim are highlighted by the fact that when China, Tibet, and Britain met at Simla in 1914 to discuss the Tibetan question, the official Chinese response to Tibetan claims about the status of Tibet stated that definite Chinese sovereignty over Tibet began only during the Qing dynasty, after the conclusion in 1792 of the Gurkha wars. See the statement of China's position in *The Boundary Question between China and Tibet* (Beijing, 1940), pp. 7-8.

2 'We arrived safely at the great city of Chengdufu in Sichuan, China, and dwelled there for three days. During that time, Chinese merchants who had previously been to Tibet, and numerous Tibetan youths from military families who had been born in Tibet, brought to China, and settled in an encampment, out of feelings of devotion to their country, presented for one day an extensive Chinese-style banquet for all of us Tibetans, along with many marvellous displays of Beijing opera [Tib. *Khrang-zhi*; Ch. *Jingxi*] performances: Rdo-ring, *Rnam-thar*, p. 919.

Both G.yu-thog and I wore a pearl earring on the right and a lustrous turquoise one on the left. Our hair was braided and, as our Tibetan clothing had been used up, and so forth, we wore Chinese clothing; thus, we had a bizarre look that was neither Chinese nor Tibetan. Moreover, in the past, travellers from Tibet who had come to the Beijing palace for the most part had only the monastic robes of lamas and monks as clothing; the secretariat officials [Tib. *krung-thang*; Ch. *zhongtang*] had never seen lay Tibetans and so asked us, 'What custom is this, to wear earrings of two different sorts on the left and the right?' As I was in the place of first rank, I answered by explaining that the wearing of a turquoise was an old Tibetan custom and the wearing of a pearl a custom that spread when those of the royal lineage of the Kokonor king G $\ddot{u}$ üshi Khan [Tib. Mtsho-sngon-gyi Rgyal-po Gau-shri Khang] were kings of Tibet. As a result, we were told that, although the Tibetans are now divine subjects under the rule of the great emperor, they wear the earrings, left and right, pertaining to old royal customs; thus, there is no place to begin wearing [a new one]. Nevertheless, they said with an air of playful joking, it seemed we should have to wear an ornament that accorded with Chinese customs on the tips of our noses.<sup>1</sup>

The exchange reveals an attitude towards the incorporation of Tibet into the Qing empire at variance with modern interpretations often intended to buttress political claims. It contradicts the official Chinese claim that Tibet became an 'integral part' of China during the Yuan period. The account also contradicts the claim made by the Dalai Lama's government-in-exile that Tibet was an independent state during the Qing period, connected to the Manchu empire only by ties of religious patronage.<sup>2</sup> Rdo-ring makes it clear that Tibet was subject to the Qing emperor, but also implies that the relationship paralleled Tibet's relationship with the Khoshuud Mongols under G $\ddot{u}$ üshi Khan and his lineage, who ruled Tibet, albeit only nominally, from the mid-seventeenth century into the early eighteenth.

In Qing thinking, too, as shown in the late seventeenth-century draft of the chapters on foreign countries, among them Tibet, compiled by You Tong for the *Mingshi*, Tibet had for some time been recognized as separate and distinct from China.<sup>3</sup> Although the events of the eighteenth century, culminating in the Gurkha wars, left Tibet subject to the Qing throne, the Qing had no need of an imaginary thirteenth-century Yuan-era union to justify this.

One aspect of the Qing imperial order in Tibet was a heightened per-

<sup>1</sup> Rdo-ring, *Rnam-thar*, p. 929.

<sup>2</sup> This is the position given in Michael C. van Walt van Praag, *The Status of Tibet* (Boulder, 1987), p. 127. One is justified in seeing this as an official position given that, for several years, van Walt has been employed by the Tibetan government-in-exile, which provided generous subsidies for the publication of his book. See 'Gal-che'i gsang-ba'i tshogs-'du zhig-gi 'phros-don', *Dmangs-gtso*, 15 Jan. 1996.

<sup>3</sup> You Tong, *Mingshi waiguozhuan* (Taipei, 1977), 6.13b-21b. Concerning his draft chapters for the *Mingshi*, see *Eminent Chinese of the Qing Period*, ed. Arthur W. Hummel (Taipei, 1970), pp. 935-6.

ception on the part of Tibetan officials of their responsibility to the emperor; after all, Rdo-ring and G.yu-thog were being judged in Beijing. Despite the at times light-hearted tone of Rdo-ring's account, he must have been relieved at the outcome of the grand council's investigation:

The gist of the edict transmitted by the secretariat officials was: 'Rdo-ring Bstan-'dzin dpal-'byor and G.yu-thog Bkra-shis don-grub are both not guilty of ignoring the grace of the Great Emperor, surrendering to the Gurkhas, and engaging in profoundly treasonous actions. But due to their inattention and to the feebleness of their own actions, they fell into the hands of the enemy and, as a result, are to be immediately stripped of the posts of *gong* [Tib. *gung*, duke] to the Great Emperor and *bka'-blon* to the Dalai Lama and no longer selected as such. Because of this, [there has been] a need for a special dispatch of troops from the interior, etc., a root cause for havoc being wrought upon sentient beings of China, Tibet, and Nepal. Customarily there would accrue great criminal culpability in this, but thinking that you did not know what was customary, the greater part of the offence has been considered with liberality. Both of you are dismissed from your positions as *bka'-blon*. Similarly, the imperially bestowed hereditary post of *gong*, the previously granted peacock feather and button ... are to be returned.<sup>1</sup>

A markedly different tone, however, is found in the Qianlong emperor's orders, following the deliberations of the grand council, recorded in a *shilu* entry dated 4 January 1793. The orders, the basis of the judgment communicated to Rdo-ring, reveal imperial dissatisfaction with an administrative system that placed heavy responsibilities in the hands of someone like him and was unresponsive to Qing attempts to make use of it:

Formerly, when the position of *bka'-blon* became vacant, the Dalai Lama always filled the place with someone from the wealthy *drung-'khor* [Ch. *dongke'er*] families,<sup>2</sup> and there was rampant mismanagement of public affairs. The *bka'-blon* are the men who manage Tibetan affairs; only by discussing whether or not their talents measure up to the task of administration can a selection be made. How can one commit [such] abuses, employing only aristocrats and those with family wealth? ... Previously I handed down orders repeatedly, commanding that, when there was a vacancy among the *bka'-blon*, the *amban* [Ch. *zhu-Zang dachen*, grand minister resident in Tibet] along with the Dalai Lama are to act properly in making a selection and submit a memorial requesting that the vacancy be thus filled ...

Bstan-'dzin dpal-'byor [Ch. Danjin banzhuer] and Bkra-shis don-grub [Ch. Zhashi dunzhubu] previously sanctioned peace. Originally, this should have merited criminal culpability, but taking into consideration the explanations they have made, the affair is now relegated to the past and will not be investigated further ... However, Bstan-'dzin dpal-'byor was bound and carried off by the

<sup>1</sup> Rdo-ring, *Rnam-thar*, pp. 930-1.

<sup>2</sup> The *drung-'khor* was the cadre of lay officials. It had 175 members, all of them members of the aristocracy. See Petech, *Aristocracy and Government*, p. 8.

Gurkhas and stayed in Kathmandu for more than a year; it was hard (for him) to remain unbowed and unpleading, etc. After returning to Tibet, it is out of the question that he again be ordered to serve as *bka'-blon*.<sup>1</sup>

On one level, the orders constitute an element in the final stage of the incorporation of Tibet into the Qing empire: they assert the right of the imperial power to appoint the highest non-ecclesiastical officials in the government. Rdo-ring's autobiography reveals the nature of the new relationship.

Immediately after the grand council's decision was read to him, he was told to be ready for an audience with the emperor the next morning and, in preparation, to learn the proper manner of making prostrations, not part of his training as a *bka'-blon*. Rdo-ring was worried about appearing before the emperor and, perhaps not surprisingly, wholly unprepared: 'While surely it is great good fortune to be able to meet the Mañjusri Emperor, lord of all below heaven and above earth, I do not have even an offering scarf [*kha-btags*] to offer, let alone gifts for the audience!'<sup>2</sup>

Rdo-ring's account of the meeting gives ample evidence of his position at court. Although plainly powerless owing to his dismissal from the post of *bka'-blon*, he was allowed limited access to the emperor in order to put him, as it were, in his place as a suitably awed and submissive member of the Tibetan élite. Thus, Rdo-ring and G.yu-thog found themselves observing the emperor's procession by the palace:

The four of us, Chinese and Tibetan, were arrayed on the right of the palanquin, our knees planted on the ground. We made nine prostrations, according to the Chinese fashion, and while we did so, our bodies stretched out and heads bent down, the palanquin approached us and turned around slightly. With Oljaltu *dalaoye* [his honour, Tib. Ol-jol-thu *tha-lo-ye*]<sup>3</sup> acting as translator, the emperor questioned us in order, first asking me 'Are you Paṇḍita's son?', and then saying to G.yu-thog 'You, fatty, are you the one who served as *bka'-blon* together with Paṇḍita's son?' After that, he asked if the two Chinese were people from Chengdufu in Sichuan. Finally, he looked closely at me and said, 'Do you understand Chinese and Mongol?' I stated that, aside from a few nouns, I did not know how to make sense of things in Chinese and that my understanding of Mongol was weak. Saying '*kögerükei ende ire* [Tib. *khur-khu khur-khu en-erde-yer*],' his hands moved back and forth from within the palanquin. What he said meant in Tibetan, 'What a pity! What a pity! Come here!,' so I went up close to the palanquin and, as before, got down on my knees and remained there. The *dharmarājā*, the heavenly-appointed Mañjusri Emperor, thinking in terms of compassion, privately conferred upon me his golden counsel: 'With regard to the root causes of the

<sup>1</sup> *Qing shilu Zangzu shiliao*, ed. Gu Zucheng et al. (Lhasa, 1985), pp. 3,503 and 3,505.

<sup>2</sup> Rdo-ring, *Rnam-thar*, p. 932.

<sup>3</sup> Otherwise unidentified.

Tibet-Gurkha conflict, as a result of the reasons that have emerged, little by little, from the officials resident in Tibet as to the manner in which your tasks throughout remained variously incomplete, you were specially summoned here for an inquest. For your part, due to your youth and powerlessness, you fell into the hands of the enemy. You have committed no greater offence than the offence of simple inattentiveness. Previously, when the Tibet-Gurkha conflict had broken out, We specially dispatched the Grand Minister of the Imperial Household Department [Tib. *nang-blon*; Ch. *nei dachen* (?)] Bajung [Tib. *Dpa'-chung*; Ch. *Bazhong*],<sup>1</sup> who deceitfully reported to me that the bandit Nepalese had bowed their heads and prostrated themselves, and so We did not carry through with campaigns, etc., and eased up. Because of that, the bandits, knowing no law, held you through craft and deceit and damaged the monastery of the Panchen Erdeni; and the roots of such varied and egregiously unacceptable actions were all linked to the official Bajung himself. As a result, We immediately judged that he had committed serious offences under the law. But prior to that, he himself recognized his offences and took his own life. Summoning back his spirit and applying the law to him is not among the ways of Our royal clan. *Bstan-'dzin dpal-'byor* and the Tibetans along with *Ao Hui* [(?) Tib. *Nga'o Hus*]<sup>2</sup> and other Sichuan officers are all outer officials and thus surely do not know in detail the ways of the interior. In that regard, if you had not listened to whatever words were uttered by the Grand Minister of the Imperial Household Department, Bajung, whose dispatch We had specially ordered, it would have been as if you were not respecting Our orders. And lest that were to have happened, We do believe you had no choice in the matter but to heed him and not carry out your tasks. This does warrant removal from all official posts; however, other offences will be handled with particular liberality. Most especially, you, *Bstan-'dzin dpal-'byor*, are of the lineage of *Paṇḍita*. Therefore, We have taken into consideration the actions of your ancestors. We protect you with Our great grace; thus, you have no need for fear or anguish. At present, the people who had been sent by the Panchen Erdeni to offer greetings to Us, an abbot with his servants, are residing among the lamas, monks, residences, and temples in the Beijing *Sira sūme* [Tib. *Sha-ra pu-mi (sic)*], the temple built during the time of my imperial ancestor when the Great Fifth Dalai Lama was invited to Beijing and the temple that had been specially built at the time when We invited the previous Panchen Erdeni.<sup>3</sup> Dwell for this special, short time with the Tibetans

<sup>1</sup> For sources on Bajung, who served as *amban* in Tibet from 1788-9, see Josef Kolmaš, *The Ambans and Assistant Ambans of Tibet (A Chronological Study)* (Prague, 1994), p. 32. The position which he appears to have held (Grand Minister of the Imperial Household Department) is given here on the assumption that the Tibetan term used by Rdo-ring, *nang-blon*, is the equivalent of the Chinese term *nei dachen*, which is used to define it in Krang Dbyi-sun [= Zhang Yisun], et al., *Bod-Rgya tshigs-mdzod chen-mo [=Zang-Han dacidian]* (Beijing, 1985), p. 1,508. Kolmaš's sources, like other available Chinese materials (e.g., Wu Fengpei and Zeng Guoqing, *Qingchao zhu Zang tachen zhidu de jianli yu yange* [Beijing, 1989], pp. 129-30), link Bajung to only one other position, that of vice-minister in the court of colonial affairs (Lifan Yuan).

<sup>2</sup> Otherwise unidentified.

<sup>3</sup> This refers to the two Huangsi or 'Yellow Temples', where both the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama mentioned in this passage resided. See Huang Hao, *Zai Beijing de Zangzu wenwu* (Beijing, 1993), pp. 44-5. The *Sira sūme* is identified as the Huangsi by Rdo-ring, *Rnam-thar*, p. 942. One may

with whom you are at ease in the Beijing Sira süme. We also grant you an allowance from Our treasury. As your directions are the same, it is fitting that you return with the Panchen Erdeni's abbot and his servants who are going back to Tibet in accord with the completion of the New Year's feasts.' Thus did the *dharmarājā*, lord of all below heaven and above earth, the Mañjusri Emperor, impart to me privately that golden counsel which is to be cherished, the beautiful form and melodious sound of which would be hard to behold with one's eyes and hear with one's ears even if one were to fill the three thousand realms with gold and strive for a period of one hundred *kalpa* [Tib. *bskal-pa*]. And not only was it imparted personally to me in Mongol without going through the aforementioned translators, when I did not get the meaning Oljaltu *dalaoye* served as translator and I obtained a repetition of the general bestowal.<sup>1</sup>

This was not the only occasion on which Rdo-ring had the opportunity to observe the emperor close at hand, but it constituted his most intense interaction with him. As might be expected, Rdo-ring is lavish in his praise of the Qianlong emperor; nonetheless, his account of what the emperor said to him is remarkably different from the emperor's thinking as expressed in the *shilu*. Whereas Rdo-ring emphasizes the emperor's admission that his misadventures were excusable, owing to his youth and weakness – born in 1760 or 1761, he was under thirty when the Gurkha wars began – the *shilu* reveals the emperor's vexation that men so unsuited were appointed to the highest secular posts in Tibet merely because of their wealth and family ties. Although the emperor showed goodwill and kindness towards Rdo-ring, he had him squarely in mind when he decried these appointments. Rdo-ring was not reappointed to the post of *bka'-blon*.

\* \* \*

Rdo-ring's autobiography reveals that, although the Qianlong emperor was taking control of Tibet's political structure, he was not dismantling it: he meant to make use of the Tibetan élite while keeping it weak and subordinate. Thus, the account provides clear evidence of the emperor's attempt to personify both awe-inspiring power and sublime benevolence. In several places, Rdo-ring records his acceptance of the Qianlong emperor as an emanation of the Bodhisattva of wisdom, Mañjusri;<sup>2</sup> in one describing himself by comparison as but an insect on the ground.<sup>3</sup>

also note that the Mongol name is given as the equivalent of the Tibetan Lha-khang ser-po (Yellow Temple) in the biography of Lcang-skya Rol-pa'i rdo-rje, *Ñi ma'i 'od zer/Naran-u gerel*, ed. Hans-Rainer Kämpfe (St Augustin, 1976), plates 11, 55, and 57 (= fos. 21v, 110r, 110v, and 114r in Tibetan); and 90, 152, and 155 (= fos. 28r, 152r, and 158v in Mongol).

<sup>1</sup> Rdo-ring, *Rnam-thar*, pp. 934-7.

<sup>2</sup> The emperor's projection of this image among Tibetan Buddhists is well known. See David M. Farquhar, 'Emperor as Bodhisattva in the Governance of the Ch'ing Empire', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, xxxviii (1978), 5-34.

<sup>3</sup> Rdo-ring, *Rnam-thar*, p. 937.

Rdo-ring's account of his first meeting with the Qianlong emperor reveals Rdo-ring's perception of himself as the object of the emperor's special consideration and care. When Rdo-ring again met the emperor soon afterwards, he compared the sight of him attended by the women of the court, his eunuchs, and officials with the venerable (in Tibetan tradition) image of the stately Indian *rājā*. When he and G.yu-thog were asked to dine with the emperor, he proudly recorded the remark of an *amban*, that he himself had not had the privilege of dining in the emperor's presence until he turned seventy.<sup>1</sup> As a final gesture of benevolence, Rdo-ring was told, prior to his departure from Beijing in March 1793, that the emperor had restored the income from some of the estates confiscated after his capture by the Gurkhas.<sup>2</sup>

Rdo-ring's account of the emperor's conduct shows how far the new order being devised for Tibet was part of an imperial enterprise designed, in this case, to place Tibet more firmly under Qing control. On 3 March 1793, Fukangga memorialized a set of regulations for managing Tibetan affairs, which was revised later in the year before being promulgated in the form of twenty-nine articles.<sup>3</sup> One of the most significant stipulations of this new blueprint for Qing imperial administration was that henceforth officials, such as *bka'-blon*, were to be chosen jointly by the Dalai Lama and the Qing minister in Tibet. The manner of Rdo-ring's appointment as *bka'-blon* was, formally at least, a thing of the past.<sup>4</sup> In effect, the Qing did not need to displace the aristocratic families or structures that had formed in the seventeenth century, during the era of the fifth Dalai Lama; in the aftermath of the Gurkha wars, the Tibetan aristocracy, by and large, made no attempt to withstand Qing domination, as it disrupted neither their roles within Tibet nor the bureaucratic structure supporting their positions. And like so many of the élite in India under the British *raj*, Tibet's aristocratic families endured into the 1950s. In fact, in both India and Tibet, the new administrative arrangements had ramifications well into the twentieth century. After independence, India had to formulate a new relationship between the princes and the central government; in Tibet, the Qing attempt to regulate Tibetan affairs more closely deteriorated in the nineteenth century as the state became increasingly weak. Nonetheless, the attempt casts a shadow over Tibet today, where the PRC is endeavouring to replace the child whom the Dalai Lama has chosen as the new incarnation of the Panchen Lama with a candidate of its own. At issue is the

<sup>1</sup> Rdo-ring, *Rnam-thar*, pp. 939-40.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 949-50.

<sup>3</sup> *Qing shilu*, ed. Gu Zucheng et al., pp. 3,526-30.

<sup>4</sup> In Rdo-ring's case, his loss of rank was reiterated in a *shilu* entry, 15 July 1793. See *Qing shilu*, ed. Gu Zucheng et al., pp. 3,568-9; see also, Petech, *Aristocracy and Government*, pp. 58-9.

government's claim to have inherited from the Qing the powers enshrined in the twenty-nine articles.

A parallel may be drawn between the situation of Tibetan aristocrats under the Qing and Indian élites in the Indian Empire. Two military crises, the rebellion in 1857 in India and the Gurkha wars of 1788-92 precipitated new relationships between Britain and India and the Qing and Tibet, based on greater involvement by the imperial government and a closer relationship with local élites. As Bernard S. Cohn explains, the durbar of 1877 at which Victoria was proclaimed empress of India was the moment when the construction of a new order in India was brought to fruition:

A social order was established with the British crown seen as the centre of authority, and capable of ordering into a single hierarchy all its subjects, Indian and British. The Indian princes now were Queen Victoria's 'loyal Indian Feudatories', who owed deference and allegiance to her through her viceroy. The governor general and the viceroy, being the same person, was unequivocally the locus of authority in India, and all the British and Indians could be ranked in relation to him, whether it be by office held, or membership in various status groups ... Henceforth only the viceroy could grant Indian titles, based on the recommendation of local or provincial officials.<sup>1</sup>

In theory, the Qing minister in Tibet was to provide a similar locus of imperial power. In theory, he had to approve titles granted to Tibetans; and in practice the Tibetan aristocracy accepted the new order that followed the Gurkha wars. However, the comparison has only limited value. During the reorganization that followed the wars, Qing authority in Tibet reached its peak: by the first decade of the nineteenth century, it was declining and the twenty-nine articles were observed only intermittently or nominally. This was not the case in India, where the British proved capable of maintaining their authority until their withdrawal in 1947. Although Qing power was increasingly ineffective in the nineteenth century, the Tibetan élite showed no interest in confronting the Qing because the dynasty had no effective impact on their positions and roles. The result was a vacuum which was bound to attract two other imperial powers, Britain and Russia. And it was this vacuum that led in great measure to what were perceived to be ambiguities regarding the position of Tibet in the first half of the twentieth century. As noted at the beginning of this essay, the incorporation of Tibet into the People's Republic of China in 1951 has not put an end to debate over the status of Tibet.

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, 'Representing Authority in Victorian India', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 180-1.