

## Community Territorialization through Monastery Construction in Tsongö (Qinghai): Pastoralist Migration and Settlement in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

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**D**uring the late eighteenth century and nineteenth century, Tibetan communities repeatedly raided and occupied the pastures of the Kokenuur Mongol banners, which were political units established after the Qing conquered them in 1724. Qing officials sent in troops on several occasions to drive the Tibetan communities back south and protect the banners,<sup>1</sup> but by 1859 officials acquiesced to Tibetan demands for land and began bestowing titles on their leaders. Within a few decades, Tibetan communities began building their own community monasteries on the grasslands (see Map 1). I argue that the Tibetan pastoralist polities engaged in a practice of territorialization through the establishment of local monasteries. These grassland monasteries linked multiple groups into a larger political community as patrons of their monastery, facilitated ties between the political communities on the grasslands and the monastic networks of prominent lamas in eastern Amdo,<sup>2</sup> and provided religious personnel to tame territorial deities. These developments together represented a structural shift on the grasslands from Mongol banners to Tibetan pastoralist polities. Mongol banner leaders, or *jasaks*, lost much of their territory and authority to Tibetan leaders who received chiliarch titles (*stong dpon*; Ch. *qianhu*) from the Qing and whose political authority relied on building local monasteries to structure their polities. In other words, the administrative system imposed by the Qing on the Tsongö grasslands unraveled and was replaced by Tibetan polities. More broadly, I argue that the

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on these conflicts, see Max Oidtmann, "Overlapping Empires: Religion, Politics, and Ethnicity in Nineteenth-Century Qinghai," *Late Imperial China* 37, no. 2 (2016): 41–91.

<sup>2</sup> Amdo is a Tibetan term denoting a cultural region that includes most of present-day Qinghai Province, Gansu Province, and a portion of Sichuan Province. I use "eastern Amdo" here to refer to the regions east of the Sun and Moon Pass (Nyi zla la, Ch. Riyue shan) where farming is possible and there was an established presence of large monasteries.

establishment of Tibetan monasteries should be analyzed as a process of community territorialization and that territorialization is one of monasteries' many social roles.<sup>3</sup>

### Overview

In 1857, the seventh year of the Daoguang Emperor's reign, the Qing empire was in dire straits. The Nian, Taiping, Miao, and Panthay rebellions were raging. While attempting to quell these uprisings, the Qing were also losing the Second Opium War and, in 1860, were forced to sign the Treaties of Tianjin by Great Britain, France, Russia, and the US. The violent incursion of international markets into the Qing empire would soon be felt far and wide, including in the grasslands surrounding Lake Tsongön (Mtsho sngon po; Ch. Qinghai hu; Mong. Kokenuur) in what is today Qinghai Province. In this year of turmoil, the Governor-General of Shaanxi and Gansu Provinces, Lebin (1797-1875),<sup>4</sup> received what should have been good news. The "wild barbarians," (Ch. *yefan*) who were currently illegally occupying Mongol banner territories, had expressed a desire to surrender (Ch. *toucheng*) to the Qing Dynasty after decades of raiding and conflict.<sup>5</sup>

What had prompted this turn? As it turns out, the Kangtsa (Rkang tsha), the strongest group among the Tibetans who had invaded the banners, were offering to "surrender" in exchange for temporary access to a dry, semi-arid area north of the Yellow River and had received the consent of the Mongol banner that owned the land. Though the region that the Kangtsa requested use of was marginal, it was north of the Yellow River, a boundary that Qing officials had spent some six decades attempting to prohibit them from crossing with armed force and blockades. It seemed likely that the Kangtsa were requesting approval to reside there in order to expand far beyond the requested territory into other banner grasslands. It was

<sup>3</sup> I follow Fabio Duarte here in defining territorialization. "[For] territory the process of attributing values is centrifugal; it is a way of marking these elements with values [...] any other person, entity or action that is present or occurs within this same portion of space is guided by, or even subject to the values imposed on the space. This is when values become rules" Fabio Duarte, *Space, Place and Territory: A Critical Review on Spatialities* (London: Routledge, 2017), 44.

<sup>4</sup> Renming quanwei, <https://newarchive.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/sncaccgi/sncacFtp> (hereafter RMQW), entry number 001343. He held this post from 1856-1862. RMQW is a database containing biographical information on historical figures compiled by the Institute of History and Philology at Academia Sinica in Taipei.

<sup>5</sup> Zhang Jixin, *Record of Experiences as an Official (Dao Xian huanhai jianwen lu)* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), 230-231.

clear to Qing officials that this was not an unconditional surrender, but rather a negotiation for territory and recognition in exchange for less trouble in the Lake Tsongön region. Despite the reservations of Qing officials, the empire—mired in multiple rebellions and conflicts—simply did not have the military capacity to force the Kangtsa and other Tibetan communities out of the Mongol banner lands. Ultimately, the settlement of these negotiations opened the door for the Tibetan communities to settle and territorialize the pastures around Lake Tsongön.

The Mongol banners in Qinghai were political units organized by the Qing officials after their forces defeated the Mongol rulers in Qinghai in 1724.<sup>6</sup> Each banner had a hereditary leader, or *jasak*, and a defined territory. The banner system in Qinghai was based largely on the reforms instituted by the Qing in Inner Mongolia. This system of rule, the *jasak*-banner system, was instituted over most of the Inner Asian territory incorporated by the Qing. In contrast was the *junxian* (lit. prefectural and county) system used in Han Chinese areas and areas deemed acculturated.<sup>7</sup> In 1725, Xining Guard (Ch. Xi-

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<sup>6</sup> The Lake Tsongön grasslands have a very complex history that is beyond the scope of this article. Many different communities have settled and established polities on it over the centuries. The Tibetan Empire (c. 600-c. 850 CE), stationed soldiers in the region, and most Tibetans there today claim descent from them. A succession of different Mongol polities entered the region beginning in the sixteenth century, including the Tümed Mongols and their leader Altan Khan. The majority of the Mongol groups that would be organized as banners by the Qing Empire were Khoshud Mongols, who arrived in the mid-seventeenth century. Many of the pastoralists living in the region, most of whom we would now consider Tibetan, were displaced by these different Mongol incursions or incorporated as their subjects. My use of the term “territorialization” may raise for some readers the question of who the indigenous subject is in this history. This is a complicated question that runs the risk of anachronistically projecting present ethnic categories into the past. The use of Tibetan here is shorthand for many different political communities, but it is important to recognize they probably did not see themselves as part of a larger Tibetan nationality. Identity was locally rooted and based on place, their monastery, their spoken language, and the political community. This is not to say that these communities, who are now officially considered Tibetan and identify as such, did not recognize their affinities with other groups discussed as Tibetan in the present article. They shared religious practices, pilgrimage and trade routes, the knowledge that their ancestors came from Central Tibet, a written language, and spoke mutually intelligible forms of Tibetan. The groups discussed as Tibetan in this article certainly recognized their differences from the Mongol nobility. It is also likely that some of the Tibetans who territorialized the Lake Tsongön grasslands during the nineteenth century were descendants of people who were displaced and knew their families had previously lived in the Lake Tsongön grasslands.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew W. Mosca, “The Expansion of the Qing Empire Before 1800,” in *The Limits of Universal Rule: Eurasian Empires Compared*, ed. Jörg Rüpke, Michal Biran,

ning wei) was upgraded to Xining Prefecture (Ch. Xining fu)<sup>8</sup> as Qing officials began to expand the *junxian* system there and attempted to incorporate Tibetan communities as regular subjects since they were believed to have submitted.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, by leaving their former lands and occupying the Mongol bannerlands, the Tibetan communities not only rejected their new status as regular subjects of Qing governance, they also deterritorialized and dismantled the primary mode of governance for non-Chinese communities, i.e. the *jasak*-banner system in the region.<sup>10</sup> In its place, the Tibetan communities territorialized the lands with a monastic-polity system and gained recognition of their leaders by Qing officials.

As a result of the displacement of the Mongol banner system and spread of Tibetan polities, these grasslands and the farming regions of eastern Amdo became tightly connected through monastic networks, and the expansion of international markets into the grasslands facilitated this process. A broader implication of my argument is that the establishment of monasteries should be analyzed as a form of territorialization in other Tibetan contexts. The establishment of a monastery could reinforce the ties between separate groups—called *tsowa* (*tsho ba*) or *dewa* (*sde ba*)—as a cohesive political community by making them the monastery's patron communities, or *lhadé* (*lha sde*). The monastery then served as a claim to territory by the political community that established and supported it.<sup>11</sup>

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and Yuri Pines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 324–25, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108771061.011>.

<sup>8</sup> Yingju Yang, *New Gazetteer of Xining Prefecture* (*Xining fu xin zhi*), ed. Yonghong Cui, Qinghai difang shizhi wenxian congshu (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1988 [1746]), 29.

<sup>9</sup> See General Nian Gengyao's pacification plan in Nian Gengyao, *Compilation of Nian Gengyao's Manchu-language Memorials Translated into Chinese* (*Nian Gengyao Man Han zouzhe yi bian*) (Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1995), 280–294, esp. 285.

<sup>10</sup> The Mongol banners did not disappear altogether but continued to persist with much smaller populations and diminished territory. See Oidtmann, "Overlapping Empires: Religion, Politics, and Ethnicity in Nineteenth-Century Qinghai," 78 for an overview of a census taken in 1910.

<sup>11</sup> There is a rich variety of Tibetan social group terminology, and the same terms can have different meanings in different places and among pastoralists and farmers. In the Lake Tsongön region under study here, *tsowa* and *dewa* generally referred to a community of herders that shared common pastureland, had a common leader, and were made up of encampments called *rukor* (*ru skor*). The political community I refer to here does not have a consistent Tibetan term, and they are generally referred to simply by their name, e.g. the Kangtsa or the Khyamru.

### 1. Qing and Tibetan Negotiations

In addition to Governor-General Lebin's memorial detailing the Kangtsa offer, there is also a source that offers a critical, behind-the-scenes look at the extent to which the Qing had secured control of the raiding situation, and the circumstances surrounding the negotiations with the Tibetan pastoralists. Zhang Jixin (1800-1878),<sup>12</sup> who held the post of Gansu Provincial Administration Commissioner (Ch. *buzhengshi*)<sup>13</sup> under Lebin from 1856-1858, kept a detailed autobiography of his years in various government posts.<sup>14</sup> He recounts how unstable the Lake Tsongön grasslands were at this time. In 1856, the Ru ngen (Ru sngan)<sup>15</sup> community had occupied positions outside the Jiayu Pass, which connects the interior of China to Xinjiang, raided a government caravan and seized 50,000 taels of silver. A couple of months later, they intercepted a memorial and destroyed it.<sup>16</sup> Lebin's forces tracked them to a mountain west of Lake Tsongön, which they had prepared to defend. The Qing forces were met with stiff resistance but eventually captured the Ru ngen leader, Talo Gyakhyil (Rta lo rgya 'khyil), and some twenty-two other captives. They beheaded all of them.<sup>17</sup> Writing more generally of the situation in Qinghai, Zhang stated that the trading inns (Ch. *xiejia*)<sup>18</sup> were har-

<sup>12</sup> RMQW 003346. For a short biography of Zhang, see Ting Zhang, *Circulating the Code: Print Media and Legal Knowledge in Qing China* (University of Washington Press, 2020), 84–86.

<sup>13</sup> Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), entry number 487.

<sup>14</sup> Ting Zhang writes, "The information in Zhang's autobiography is likely trustworthy. In most cases, Zhang seems candid and sincere. Unlike most contemporary officials, Zhang did not write his autobiography for publication and did not brag about his own contributions" (*Circulating the Code*, 218).

<sup>15</sup> There are several Tibetan spellings for this group's name, including Ri sngun and Ru ngen.

<sup>16</sup> Zhang Jixin, *Record of Experiences as an Official* (*Dao Xian huanhai jianwen lu*), 222.

<sup>17</sup> There is a modern, Tibetan-language account of this conflict that denies Ru ngen wrongdoing and claims it took place in 1853; see Btsun kho, *Ru sngan khag gsum gyi lo rgyus dung gi 'bod brda* (Zi ling: Mtsho sngon bod rigs zhib 'jug tshogs pa, 2004), 46–47.

<sup>18</sup> In recent years, more research has been dedicated to these institutions. See Bianca Horlemann, "Tibetan Nomadic Trade, the Chinese 'Xiejia' System and the Sino-Tibetan Border Market in Stong 'Khor/ Dan'Gaer In 19th/ 20th Century A Mdo," in *Studies on the History and Literature of Tibet and the Himalaya* (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2012), 109–43; Bianca Horlemann "Tibetans and Muslims in Northwest China: Economic and Political Aspects of a Complex Historical Relationship," *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 21 (2012): 141–86; and Yang Hongwei and Max Oidtman, "A Study of Qing Dynasty 'Xiejia' Rest Houses in Xunhua Subprefecture, Gansu," in *Muslims in Amdo Tibetan Society: Multidisciplinary Ap-*

boring stolen goods from the grasslands and everyone in Xining, Pingfan, Guide, and Bayanrong, including the Tibetans, Mongols, and Muslims, were involved in the raiding. Furthermore, he wrote that government officials in Qinghai were complicit. Remarkably, he also claimed that more than 53,000 Tibetans had crossed the Yellow River and were now occupying the Lake Tsongön grasslands, an enormous population transfer for this sparsely populated region.<sup>19</sup>

When the Kangtsa entered negotiations in 1857, Lebin was unable to personally travel and sent Naxun Agula on his behalf. Naxun Agula reported to Lebin that he had met with the Kangtsa leader in a temple, who vowed that his people would no longer engage in raiding if they were allowed to live on the land north of the river. The Kangtsa leader even offered the use of his community's cattle to open land for cultivation, and he offered his community's horses and labor to extract copper from the mountains in the Tsaidam basin in exchange for barley. When Zhang heard this report, he was incredulous. Lebin also had misgivings and was of the opinion that refusing or accepting their surrender were both dangerous options, for if they accepted the Kangtsa's surrender on their terms, they would likely raid and seize more Mongol banner territories. However, if they refused their surrender, the Tibetan pastoralists would likely occupy more banner lands regardless, continue raiding Qing caravans, and causing other problems. Rather than make a decision, Lebin decided to instead take the situation "day by day."<sup>20</sup>

The new Xining Amban,<sup>21</sup> the Manchu Tugabu (d. 1860),<sup>22</sup> was also reluctant to decide how to handle the problem and feigned ignorance of the situation, deferring to Lebin. According to Zhang, this angered Lebin. Zhang reminded Tugabu that the responsibility of the Tibetans and Kokenuur Mongols were supposed to be under his direct authority as the Xining Amban, and only then under the purview of the Governor-General. However, Tugabu stalled for a year. He then secretly arranged for the Mongol nobility to come to the office and sign their agreement to share their land with the Tibetans

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*proaches*, ed. Marie-Paule Hille, Bianca Horlemann, and Paul K. Nietupski (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 21–46.

<sup>19</sup> Zhang Jixin, *Record of Experiences as an Official* (*Dao Xian huanhai jianwen lu*), 230–31.

<sup>20</sup> Zhang Jixin, *Record of Experiences as an Official* (*Dao Xian huanhai jianwen lu*), 231.

<sup>21</sup> The Xining Amban was an office created after the Qing conquest of Qinghai in 1724. It was tasked with overseeing the administration of the Qinghai Mongol banners and some Tibetan communities. For more information on this office, see Gray Tuttle, "The Institution of the Qinghai Amban," in *Histories of Tibet: Essays in Honor of Leonard W.J. van Der Kuijp*, ed. Kurtis R. Schaeffer, Jue Liang, and William A. McGrath (New York: Wisdom Publications, 2023), 569–83.

<sup>22</sup> RMQW 001526.

and assume responsibility for them. Only at Naxun Agula's repeated urging did the Mongols present a statement, but it deferred their acceptance, stating that they did not understand these matters well but would surely sign if Lebin and other officials instructed them to do so. When Tugabu showed their statement to Lebin, he did not have confidence in their consent to allow the Tibetans into their territories and the officials feared that the Mongols would neglect to take responsibility for the Tibetans in their territory. Zhang often speaks of an agreement in which the Mongol banners would be guarantors (Ch. *bao*) for the Tibetans, but clearly the Mongols were in no position to protect, enforce discipline on, or resist the tens of thousands of Tibetans who had crossed into their territory. In other words, *bao* appears to be a euphemism for not complaining about the conduct of the Tibetans in their land, not appealing for military support from the Qing if they began raiding the banners or others, and accepting responsibility for the Tibetans' conduct and its consequences.<sup>23</sup> The Mongol leaders had suffered continual raiding for the greater part of a century and the mass flight of their subjects in more recent decades. It is hardly surprising that they were reluctant to agree to the permanent presence of tens of thousands of Tibetans in their territory and accept full responsibility for any problems that arose from them.

The Kangtsa responded to the silence stemming from indecision by the Xining Amban and the Governor-General of Shaanxi and Gansu by raising the stakes. In 1857, they seized a high lama and his party who were passing through the Tsaidam on their way to Beijing from Tibet. They seized their personal belongings, horses, and the tribute items they were bringing to the court. The Kangtsa released one monk to let the authorities know that if they were allowed to surrender, i.e. stay on the occupied land, they would allow the high lama to proceed to Beijing, but if not, they would kill him. Naxun Agula was sent out to negotiate with the Kangtsa leader and returned saying that he had convinced the Kangtsa to return the stolen items and let the caravan proceed, but that if the caravan returned from Beijing before a memorial was issued clearly accepting their surrender and their right to stay on the land, they would not allow the lama and his party to return back to Tibet.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Zhang cites an instance where of Mongol "craftiness" in which the banners pledged to be responsible for the Yongsha community but quickly pursued a complaint against them. See Zhang Jixin, *Record of Experiences as an Official* (*Dao Xian huanhai jianwen lu*), 232.

<sup>24</sup> Zhang Jixin, *Record of Experiences as an Official* (*Dao Xian huanhai jianwen lu*), 232. Gombozhav Tsybikov (1873-1930), a Buryat Mongol and Russian subject who traveled through Amdo at the turn of the century, recounted how his party took

We can see the use of the term “surrender” as a euphemism in accordance with Qing official discourse.<sup>25</sup> Understanding this stand-off between the Qing and pastoral communities as a negotiation, one in which the pastoralist polities held considerable leverage, is much more clarifying. Qing officials were facing a situation in which they were losing control of a significant portion of one of their most loosely incorporated territories and their *jasak*-banner administration was breaking down. If officials refused the pastoralists’ demands, it was clear they would remain without Qing authorization, continue raiding, and not comply with Qing orders. If on the other hand, the Qing accepted their offer, they could engage in formal relations with the communities, expect that they would cease raiding Qing authorized caravans, and that they would offer occasional military service to Xining. Accepting the Kangtsa’s terms betrayed imperial weakness, but it prevented the loss of a significant borderland holding routes into Tibet and Xinjiang. Accordingly, the standoff was resolved when the Qing officials capitulated and accepted the terms of the

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the southern route around Lake Tsongön in 1900 to avoid the Kangtsa and their notorious leader, Lama Rabten. It was apparently well known among travelers at the time of Tsybikov’s journey that the Kangtsa had previously held the political and religious leader of Mongolia, the Jibdzundamba Khutugtu, hostage when he passed through their territory while returning to Mongolia from Tibet. Tsybikov states that the Amban was unable to force his release and a large ransom had to be paid on the condition that he protected Mongols traversing through in the future. According to Tsybikov, Lama Rabten realized this was a lucrative opportunity and began collecting a toll of approximately two *qian*, or 30 kopecks, per person from then on backed by a threat of physical force. See Gombozhav T. Tsybikov, *A Buddhist Pilgrim at the Shrines of Tibet* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 28. According to a modern Tibetan source, Lama Rabten lived from 1814-1893, so he would have been dead by the time Tsybikov would have passed through, but it is not surprising that he did not know this. In any case, the Kangtsa were still a threat and collecting tolls. Modern Tibetan and Chinese sources give a quite different account stating that the Jibdzundamba had been attacked by bandits several times while traveling to Lhasa and approached the Kangtsa leader for protection. Lama Rabten was happy to oblige and dispatched some armed escorts to accompany him. The Tibetan government was apparently grateful and rewarded Lama Rabten with valuables and a copper seal declaring him a “great chiliarch” (*stong dpon chen mo*). See Rgya po and Tshul khriims, *Mtsho sngon po’i Rkang tsha’i lo rgyus mes po’i zhal lung* (Zi ling: Kan su’u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1996), 20–21; Gangcha xian zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., *Gangcha County Gazetteer* (*Gangcha xian zhi*), Qinghai sheng difangzhi congshu (Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1997), 652; and Sha bo bkra shis, *Mtsho sngon lho rgyud mna’ mthun tsho ba brgyad kyi spyi khyab stong dpon chen mo Rkang tsha’i Dpal bzang mchog dang ’brel ba’i lo rgyus snying bsdu*s (Zang kang: Then mā dpe skrun kung zi, 2004), 55–58.

<sup>25</sup> For more on the implications of Qing discourse, see Lydia He Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).



Kangtsa.<sup>26</sup>

Zhang Jixin was not optimistic about this outcome for several reasons. The Kangtsa had never been conquered, the Mongols' agreement to their presence did not seem sincere, recognition of the Kangtsa leader did not address other Tibetan groups who had previously migrated into banner lands, and he thought it would likely encourage even more Tibetans to cross the river.<sup>27</sup> He believed the country did not possess the military strength to conquer the Tibetans around Lake Tsongön with ongoing rebellions elsewhere in the empire. Furthermore, the Mongols had only agreed to temporarily allow them to stay on a piece of land without adequate grass or water. Zhang asked if the Tibetans wished to migrate because they did not have adequate grass or water south of the river, why would they migrate to another inhospitable piece of land and honor their agreement to stay there?<sup>28</sup>

Regardless of Zhang and other officials' reservations, they were left with little choice but to make peace with the Kangtsa and accommodate their demands. With the emperor's approval, Lebin dispatched officials to accept the Kangtsa and the other groups' surrender, take a census, and delineate their territory.<sup>29</sup> The emperor appeared resigned in his response and approved of the plan, stating that their only option was to "maintain loose control" (*zhihao jimi* 只好羈縻[縻]), work to maintain the peace, and instruct the Mongols to strengthen themselves. He claimed that if the Tibetans continued to cause problems, they could expel them later. Given the empire's failure to do so for decades coupled with its ongoing crises, this last claim appears to be more about asserting imperial dignity than a realistic assessment. Perhaps even more unrealistically, he claimed

<sup>26</sup> Zhang Jixin, *Record of Experiences as an Official* (*Dao Xian huanhai jianwen lu*), 235–36; Lebin 樂斌, XF 08/08/22 (September 28, 1858), "奏為遵旨派委明幹大員隨同西甯辦事大臣查辦投誠番務復奏事," 故樞 003137 / 603000220-002, National Palace Museum Qing Dynasty Archives, Taipei; Lebin 樂斌, XF 08/11/25 (December 29, 1858), "奏為查明寧夏地方出產米糧價值及道路情形難以招商販運緣由奏祈聖鑒(附件:奏西寧口外剛咱等族野番請投誠一案)," 故宮 128472 / 406009648, National Palace Museum Qing Dynasty Archives, Taipei.

<sup>27</sup> Zhang Jixin, *Record of Experiences as an Official* (*Dao Xian huanhai jianwen lu*), 236, 256–57.

<sup>28</sup> Zhang Jixin, *Record of Experiences as an Official* (*Dao Xian huanhai jianwen lu*), 235–236.

<sup>29</sup> Lebin 樂斌, XF 08/11/25 (December 29, 1858), "奏為查明寧夏地方出產米糧價值及道路情形難以招商販運緣由奏祈聖鑒(附件:奏西寧口外剛咱等族野番請投誠一案)," 故宮 128472 / 406009648, National Palace Museum Qing Dynasty Archives, Taipei.

that if the Mongols were able to rebuild their strength, they could drive out the Tibetans themselves.<sup>30</sup>

In 1858, an official proposed withdrawing troops from the area after recognizing the Kangtsa claims,<sup>31</sup> and in 1859 the Kangtsa leader Lama Rabten (Bla ma rab brtan), formerly a rebellious troublemaker of high order, was bestowed the fourth-rank cap badge and a peacock feather (Ch. *sipin hualing*).<sup>32</sup> The blockade was lifted, they were able to access goods and trade their products in the market town of Tongkor (Stong 'khor; Ch. Dan'gaer)<sup>33</sup> again. With the Qing government no longer a looming threat, the Kangtsa were able to begin transitioning into a new phase of settlement.

## 2. Tibetan Forms of Territorialization

Official recognition for these communities meant most importantly an end to military attacks by Qing forces and the lifting of blockades preventing them from accessing grain and other market goods. However, recognition by the Qing dynasty tells us little about how the communities made these grasslands their homes. After securing the acquiescence of the Qing government to occupy the former pastures of Mongol banners, the pastoralist communities had to territorialize their new lands. To understand this process, we must examine Tibetan views on land, local gods, the roles of monasteries, and the mediation of religious specialists. We must also examine related historical developments in the Qing. Ultimately, this process of pastoralist territorialization simultaneously influenced and was influenced by larger structural changes in the late Qing. As we will see, the Great Northwestern Rebellion (c. 1862-1874)<sup>34</sup> and the Hehuang Rebellion (1895-1896) strengthened the relationship between the new pastoralist polities and some reincarnate lamas and monasteries in

<sup>30</sup> Fuji 福濟, XF 09/06/01 (June 30, 1859), “奏為親督委員出口查勘投誠野番謹將籌辦大概情形具陳事,” 故樞 003153 / 603000236-001, National Palace Museum Qing Dynasty Archives, Taipei.

<sup>31</sup> Deng Chengwei, *Supplement to the Xining Gazetteer (Xining fu xu zhi)*, ed. Zhang Jiaqing, Lai Weili, and Ji Shenglan, Qinghai Difang Shizhi Wenxian Congshu (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 2016 [1883]), 120.

<sup>32</sup> *Wenzong shilu* 331:926 (XF 09/10/17), in *Veritable Records of the Qing Dynasty (Qing shilu)* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985).

<sup>33</sup> Another Tibetan spelling is Stong skor. The location of the old town is in present-day Huangyuan County and is now a tourist site.

<sup>34</sup> This conflict is also known as the Dungan Revolt and the Tongzhi Hui Revolt. See Hannah Rebecca Theaker, “Moving Muslims: The Great Northwestern Rebellion and the Transformation of Chinese Islam, 1860-1896,” PhD diss., (University of Oxford, 2018), 75-109.

eastern Amdo. Beginning around 1880, an international wool boom brought wealth to the pastoralist polities, which also facilitated stronger relationships with eastern Amdo and the establishment of new, permanent monasteries on the grasslands. This process offers us a window into the territorial roles of Tibetan monasteries.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the missionary and ethnographer, Robert Ekvall, observed that many pastoralist communities in Amdo had successfully fended off the ecclesiastical rule of monasteries, and in so doing, had maintained more power within their "chiefs" (*mgo ba*) and elders.<sup>35</sup> The situation in the Qinghai grasslands from the 1860s echo Ekvall's descriptions of other Amdo communities. Due to the lack of regional monasteries during this period, the pastoralists living around Lake Tsongön in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were also largely free from monastic dictate.

Why, then, would local rulers want to build monasteries? In an unstable context in which groups are continually fighting over pastureland and raiding one another, I argue that the establishment and patronage of monasteries is a form of placemaking and territorialization. Founding, or sponsoring the establishment of a monastery, is an act of claiming. Due to the unique role of monasteries in Tibetan societies as administrative, financial, and quasi-military institutions, they are the major form of built place in Tibet. In terms of organizing Tibetan conceptions of space, they are matched only by natural phenomena, namely mountains, rivers, and lakes. In a politically unstable region, the establishment of a monastery is a form of staking claim to a place that has cultural significance. In a legend about the transmission of Buddhism into Tibet, the seventh-century Guru Rinpoche, or Padmasambhava, subdued Tibet's local spirits through the construction of temples and paving the way for the introduction of Buddhism. This legend also involves the subjugation of local territorial deities, which we will discuss below. Perhaps more importantly for local rulers, founding a monastery also established them as a respected and powerful political leader acting as a patron for the Buddhist teachings and a lama. In other words, the priest-patron relationship in this context is a form of territorialization; the local ruler was bolstered through his relationships with the local lama and with the major lama from the mother monastery.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Robert B. Ekvall, *Cultural Relations on the Kansu-Tibetan Border* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939), 69.

<sup>36</sup> Tibetan monasteries commonly have a "mother monastery" (*ma dgon*) with whom the child (*bu dgon*), or branch monastery (*dgon lag*), is affiliated. This relationship varies widely between institutions, but common features include a shared liturgical calendar and visits from the mother monastery's important la-

Furthermore, the establishment of local monasteries in the grasslands would facilitate ties between the new polities and major monasteries, most notably with Ditsa,<sup>37</sup> in eastern Amdo, and Ragya,<sup>38</sup> in southern Amdo (see Map 2). While the local communities benefited from affiliating with these major monasteries, they were also able to maintain considerable local power as they were geographically distant and the mother monasteries were not able to exercise nearly the same degree of authority that they could over their own nearby patron communities. For example, Labrang was able to intervene in village politics and collect outright taxes, not just religious donations, from patron communities within its territory that were relatively far from Lake Tsongön.<sup>39</sup> The new monasteries provided the established monasteries, particularly its high lamas, with new religious patrons, but the established monasteries could not expect to exert this level of political control in the Tsongön grasslands. In fact, when local leaders sponsored the construction of a community monastery, they benefited from affiliating with major monasteries and lamas while also securing the institutional benefits of the local monastery. For example, local monasteries allowed communities to incorporate refugees, participate in trade networks, store trade items, and produce grain. In other words, the establishment of local monasteries allowed polities to territorialize the grasslands, while also allowing them to participate in the larger networks of major monasteries and lamas without subordinating too much of their own authority.

Tibetans also have indigenous concepts of territoriality involving local gods. The land is full of different types of invisible beings, and communities must act appropriately to avoid misfortune. Territorial deities (*gzhi bdag*; *yul lha*) are believed to cause problems or help inhabitants living in an area, depending on their relationship with the people. For example, the deities can control weather, natural disasters, crop outcomes, and the health of local people. Local deities are propitiated to handle mundane matters, whereas Buddhist deities are more closely connected with notions of karma, rebirth, and en-

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mas to the branch monastery. Monks from a branch monastery often pursue further training at its mother monastery as well. For more on the shared liturgical calendars between mother and child monasteries, see Brenton Sullivan, *Building a Religious Empire: Tibetan Buddhism, Bureaucracy, and the Rise of the Gelukpa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

<sup>37</sup> Buddhist Digital Resource Center, <https://www.bdrc.io> (hereafter BDRC), G1PD96117. I have omitted Tibetan transcriptions for places and people with a BDRC entry for ease of reading because they easily be retrieved from there.

<sup>38</sup> BDRC G398.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Kocot Nietupski, *Labrang Monastery a Tibetan Buddhist Community on the Inner Asian Borderlands, 1709-1958* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 62.

lightenment. If territorial deities are kept happy, they can act as a source of fortune (*g.yang*) for communities. Their abodes are usually holy mountains, though the mountain and the deity itself are coterminous. In order to ensure that they act as benevolent forces, it is common for lamas to subjugate (*'dul ba*) these deities with Buddhist ritual.<sup>40</sup>

The territorial deities are associated with martial activity and usually depicted on horseback with weapons. For a group to successfully conquer and occupy a territory, they must win over the territorial deity.<sup>41</sup> Conversely, if the settled community maintains a good relationship with the territorial deity, it will help them prevent and defend against invasion. A local deity is also believed to have a strong connection with a polity's leader.<sup>42</sup> Many communities view their local deity as an ancestor, in some cases, specifically the ancestor of the leader's lineage.<sup>43</sup>

Territorial deities are propitiated in shrines, or *labtsé* (*la brtse*),<sup>44</sup> that communities build for them, and they travel throughout their domain, so the maintenance of these shrines is important to the welfare of the community. Labtsé are typically located on a mountain and can be placed on the summit, a mid-section of the mountain, or

<sup>40</sup> There is a substantial body of literature on territorial deities. See, e.g., Anne-Marie Blondeau and Ernst Steinkellner, eds., *Reflections of the Mountain: Essays on the History and Social Meaning of the Mountain Cult in Tibet and the Himalaya*, Veröffentlichungen Zur Sozialanthropologie (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, 1996); Anne-Marie Blondeau, ed., *Tibetan Mountain Deities, Their Cults and Representations: Papers Presented at a Panel of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, Graz, 1995, International Association for Tibetan Studies (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1998); and Samten G. Karmay, *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History* (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 1998). For an excellent explanation of the relationship between territorial deities, the community, and lamas, see Martin Mills, *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism: The Foundations of Authority in Gelukpa Monasticism* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), esp. 243-262.

<sup>41</sup> Rahel Tsering, "The Warrior in the Mountain and His People: Labtse Mountain Cult and Its Social Significance in an Amdo Tibetan Village," in *Mapping Amdo: Dynamics of Change*, ed. Jarmila Ptáčková and Adrian Zenz (Prague: Oriental Institute, the Czech Academy of Sciences, 2017), 126.

<sup>42</sup> Samten G. Karmay, "The Cult of Mountain Deities and Its Political Significance," in *The Arrow and the Spindle: Studies in History*, by Samten G. Karmay (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 1998), 432 ; Niangwujia and Hanna Havnevik, "The Remaking of a Tibetan Mountain Cult Festival: The Worship of Landscape Deities in the Rebgong Valley, Amdo," *Religion* 53, no. 3 (2023): 457, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2023.2211396>.

<sup>43</sup> Niangwujia and Havnevik, "The Remaking of a Tibetan Mountain Cult Festival," 457.

<sup>44</sup> This term has numerous Tibetan spellings.

its base, but are higher than the community.<sup>45</sup> The visible parts of a labtsé include a central pillar (*srog shing*), large arrow-spears, woolen cords, juniper branches, flags, and other items. The subterranean foundation of the labtsé contains a dugout chamber, filled with a deity's effigy, grains, a treasure vase, butter, and weapons.<sup>46</sup> In short, monasteries and labtsé serve as territorial markers for political communities.

### 3. *The Merging of the Tsongön Grasslands and Amdo Through Monastic Networks*

While the communities established a permanent presence in their new lands, conflicts in the east implicated them. Soon after the nomadic communities won Qing acceptance of their presence north of the Yellow River, the Great Northwestern Rebellion (c. 1862-1874) broke out. The destruction spread from Shaanxi across eastern Amdo. Muslim rebels targeted communal sites, including Tibetan monasteries and Chinese temples.<sup>47</sup> Some of the newly settled communities were called on to provide fighters to defend monasteries, e.g. the Eight Lhadé Tsowa (Lha sde tsho brgyad), sent members to defend Kumbum monastery.<sup>48</sup> Tibetan pastoralist polities were called in by both the Qing state and their religious networks to defend monasteries in eastern Amdo. For their service, some leaders of pastoralist polities received state recognition and titles.<sup>49</sup>

In the aftermath of this revolt, eastern Amdo was transformed. Many monasteries were destroyed or damaged, and many of their patron communities were also harmed. Furthermore, Qing government payments to monasteries, instituted to replace monastic taxation on local communities during the post-1724 reforms, almost surely dried up. Monasteries needed funds to rebuild and could not look to their patron communities or the Qing government. As we will see below, a handful of important incarnate lamas provided the funds for reconstructing eastern Amdo and built relationships with the recently settled nomadic polities, collecting donations on teaching tours and also overseeing the establishment of monasteries in the

<sup>45</sup> Nangchukja, *A Mang rdzong Tibetan Life*, Asian Highlands Perspectives 11 (Xining: Asian Highlands Perspectives, 2011), 8.

<sup>46</sup> Rahel Tsering, "Labtse Construction and Differentiation in Rural Amdo," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 37 (2016): 451–68.

<sup>47</sup> Wesley Byron Chaney, "Land, Trade, and the Law on the Sino-Tibetan Border, 1723-1911," PhD diss., (Stanford University, 2016), 312.

<sup>48</sup> BDRC G160.

<sup>49</sup> See e.g., Dge ming dpal, *Lha sde tsho brgyad kyi lo rgyus kun 'dus gsal ba'i me long* (n.p., 2005), 44-45.

grasslands in subsequent decades. An international wool boom beginning in the 1880s served as a boon for the pastoralist polities, benefitting the communities themselves, allowing them to make donations to powerful lamas—as we will see below—and helping with the establishment of their own permanent monasteries on the grasslands. Through this process, the Tsongön grasslands and eastern Amdo became more closely linked.

During the Great Northwestern Rebellion, two incarnate lamas, The Fourth Tarshul Rinpoche, Gendun Lobzang Chökyong Gyatso (1810-1884/1888)<sup>50</sup> and the Third Shingza Rinpoche, Lobzang Tenpé Wangchuk Tsultrim Puntsok (1825-1897),<sup>51</sup> would spearhead efforts to restore damaged monasteries in eastern Amdo. Later, they would train younger lamas and aid in the construction of new monasteries in the grasslands of western Amdo. All of these lamas hailed from grasslands communities and also held strong connections with established Gelukpa (Dge lugs pa) monasteries in eastern Amdo.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, they were in an ideal position to connect the pastoralist polities and their new monasteries with the established monasteries in eastern Amdo. Ultimately, the networks these lamas formed with one another and with grasslands communities through the establishment of new monasteries represented a transformation of political structures on the grasslands, namely a shift from the banner system to one of local monasteries and their patrons enmeshed in networks of powerful tulkus and their home monasteries.

The Fourth Tarshul Rinpoche, Chökyong Gyatso, was born in 1810 in Chojé Lukhar, in what was officially Mongol banner territory, in the Tarshul Tsowa.<sup>53</sup> During the late 1850s, the Atsok (A tshogs) would occupy this land, and at least a section of the Tarshul

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<sup>50</sup> BDRC P267.

<sup>51</sup> BDRC P324.

<sup>52</sup> The Gelukpa were the politically dominant school of Tibetan Buddhist from the seventeenth century onward and have a long history of expansion in Amdo. See Gray Tuttle, "Building up the Dge Lugs Pa Base in A Mdo: The Role of Lhasa, Beijing and Local Agency," *Journal of Tibetology (Zangxue Xuekan)* 7 (2012): 126–40 and Brenton Sullivan, *Building a Religious Empire: Tibetan Buddhism, Bureaucracy, and the Rise of the Gelukpa*. In the above article, Tuttle outlines four periods of Gelukpa expansion in Amdo. The present article could be considered a fifth period of expansion beginning c. 1880.

<sup>53</sup> A contemporary source states that the Dushul, Wanshul, and Tarshul tsowas together make up what is called the Three Tarshul Tsowas (*thar shul tsho gsum*); see Bla nag pa ye shes bzang po, *Mang ra'i lo rgyus* (Zhang kang: Zhang kang then mā dpe skrun khang, 2001), 32. Another contemporary sources states that the Tarshul tsowa was one of the Four Arrows (*Mda' bzhi*) of Cagan Nomunhan and moved with them from south of the river in present-day Mang County (Mang rdzong; Ch. Guinan xian) to east of Lake Tsongön in present-day Dabzhi County in the nineteenth century (*Mda' bzhi rdzong*; Ch. Haiyan xian).

Tsowa would follow the prominent banner leader, Cagan Nomunhan, to flee from raiding.<sup>54</sup> His family was nomadic, and it is unclear if they were banner subjects or not. His incarnation line holds a throne at Lamo Dechen monastery.<sup>55</sup> Tarshul Rinpoche began touring and making offerings to repair the numerous monasteries that were damaged or destroyed during the Great Northwestern Rebellion. The Third Shingza Rinpoche,<sup>56</sup> Lobzang Tenpé Wangchuk Tsultrim, was born in 1825 east of Amnye Machen, near Ragya. His mother was named Rinchen Drolma and was the daughter of a Torghut Mongol ruler in the east. His father, Gonpo Dorjé, was a Mongol *jasak* in the lineage of Gushi Khan and was also a descendant of an important patron for Ragya during its founding, *Jasak Wangchuk Rabten* (Dbang phyug rab brtan).<sup>57</sup> He took Tarshul Rinpoche as a teacher and received many teachings from him.

In 1867, the violence reached the subprefectural seat at Guide (Khri ka), a Qing outpost surrounded by Tibetan communities. The local Muslim leaders Fa Zhengqing, Ma Shuangge, and Wang Zaxi led a force of 3,000 people to attack Guide. They killed the magistrate (Ch. *tongzhi*) and more than 300 commoners. When a Qing leader mounted a counterattack, Fa Zhengqing called in Ma Wenyi's forces for support and killed the official and others. Four months would pass from Fa Zhengqing's initial attack before the city was recaptured.<sup>58</sup> During this time, the assembly halls of many nearby Tibetan monasteries were burned down, including Gongwa Dratsang,<sup>59</sup> Chokrong Dratsang,<sup>60</sup> Horgya Dratsang (Hor rgya grwa tshang),

<sup>54</sup> 'Brug thar and Sangs rgyas rin chen, *Mda' bzhi'i lo rgyus gsal ba'i me long zhes bya ba bzhuks so* (Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2013), 34.

<sup>55</sup> BDRC G271. For more on this monastery, see Hanung Kim, "Preliminary Notes on Lamo Dechen Monastery and Its Two Main Incarnation Lineages," *Archiv Orientalní Suppl* 11 (2019): 77–97; Gray Tuttle and Tsehuajia, "Power and Politics in Chentsa Before Communist Rule," 2010, <http://places.kmaps.virginia.edu/features/15480>; Gray Tuttle, "An Overview of Amdo (Northeastern Tibet) Historical Politics | Mandala Collections - Texts," August 29, 2013, <https://texts.mandala.library.virginia.edu/text/overview-amdo-northeastern-tibet-historical-politics>.

<sup>56</sup> There are different enumerations for the number of incarnations of the Shingza Rinpoches.

<sup>57</sup> Mkhas btsun bzang bo, *Rwa rgya dga' ldan bkra shis 'byung gnas bshad sgrub dar rgyas gling gi gdan rabs gser gyi phreng ba zhes bya ba bzhuks so* (Lanzhou: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2017), 147.

<sup>58</sup> Guide xian difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed. *Guide County Gazetteer (Guide xian zhi)*, Qinghai sheng difangzhi congshu (Xian: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1995), 12.

<sup>59</sup> BDRC G1837.

<sup>60</sup> BDRC G1836.



Minyak,<sup>61</sup> Tretsé,<sup>62</sup> Dekyi (Bde skyid),<sup>63</sup> and Serkya (Ser kyA).<sup>64</sup> Tarshul Rinpoche helped rebuild these with the assistance of Gong-wa Dratsang's treasurer.

Both Tarshul Rinpoche and Shingza Rinpoche, who had been born into Mongol nomadic communities, were recognized as incarnate lamas and brought to monasteries in eastern Amdo. Given their loyalty to Gelukpa Tibetan Buddhism, they helped rebuild during the Great Northwest Rebellion, would oversee the construction of monasteries by the pastoralist groups after they won Qing recognition, and would go on to train other incarnate lamas who would oversee the construction of additional monasteries. One of these lamas, the Fourth Amdo Zhamar, Gendun Tendzin Gyatso (1852-1912),<sup>65</sup> was born to a nomadic family of Mongol lineage within the Dabzhi (Mda' bzhi; lit. "The Four Arrows"), which was one of Cagan Nomunhan's banner communities that fled to northeast of Lake Tsongön from south of the Yellow River. He was recognized as the reincarnation of the Third Amdo Zhamar, Ngakwang Tendzin Gyatso (1807-1848),<sup>66</sup> whose seat was at the major monastery of Lamo Dechen. He would go on to have a strong relationship with both Tarshul Rinpoche and Shingza Rinpoche. He was enthroned at his predecessor's seat in 1855, and in 1859, he received novice vows from Tarshul Rinpoche.<sup>67</sup> In 1903, he founded Ditsa monastery, which at its height had 3,000 monks and would serve as the mother monastery for many of the new grassland monasteries in the Lake Tsongön grasslands.<sup>68</sup>

This network of high lamas—Tarshul Rinpoche (Lamo Dechen), the Shingza Rinpoches (Ragya), the Amdo Zhamar (Ditsa), and the

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<sup>61</sup> BDRC G1KR2522.

<sup>62</sup> BDRC G1853.

<sup>63</sup> This is likely BDRC G1KR2540.

<sup>64</sup> Shes rab bstan dar, *Chos skyong rgya mtsho'i rnam thar* (Lan kru'u: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2016), 39–40.

<sup>65</sup> BDRC P196.

<sup>66</sup> Tsering Namgyal, "The Third Amdo Zhamar, Ngawang Tendzin Gyatso," *The Treasury of Lives: A Biographical Encyclopedia of Tibet, Inner Asia and the Himalayan Region*, January 2013, <https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Third-Amdo-Zhamar-Ngawang-Tendzin-Gyatso/6099>. BDRC P373.

<sup>67</sup> Grags pa rgya mtsho, *Rje zhwa dmar dge 'dun bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho'i rnam thar* (Zi ling: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1990), 67.

<sup>68</sup> Tsering Namgyal, "The Fourth Amdo Zhamar, Gendun Tendzin Gyatso," *The Treasury of Lives: A Biographical Encyclopedia of Tibet, Inner Asia and the Himalayan Region*, January 2013, <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Fourth-Amdo-Zhamar-Gendun-Tendzin-Gyatso/3296>.

Arol Rinpoches (Rongwo)<sup>69</sup>—trained the incarnations of one another and served as the institutional foundation for the newly settled communities in the Tsongön grasslands to build their own community monasteries. From Ragya monastery, the Third Shingza Rinpoche, and his successor, the Fourth Shingza Rinpoche would serve as the main lama for the construction of community monasteries south and west of Lake Tsongön. From his base at Ditsa monastery, the Amdo Zhamar would serve as the main lama for numerous new community monasteries that became its branch monasteries (*dgon lag*), especially in Kangtsa. The Second Arol Rinpoche trained the Third Shingza Rinpoche and the Fourth Amdo Zhamar. His successor, the Third Arol Rinpoche, Lobzang Lungtok Tenpé Gyeltsen Pel Zangpo (1888-1958), would travel within the mother-child networks of monasteries belonging to the Shingza Rinpoches and the Amdo Zhamar, and he would gather material and political support to build the enormous monastery of Drakkar Trelldzong in the 1920s.<sup>70</sup> Considerable support was given by the Atsok, Shabrang (Shabrang), Kangtsa,<sup>71</sup> and other communities when Arol Rinpoche visited their newly established monasteries.<sup>72</sup> Drakkar Trelldzong became a monastery for the wider Tsongön grasslands region and its different political communities. The founding of Drakkar Trelldzong, therefore, was an outcome of migration, territorialization, and local monastery construction in the Tsongön grasslands.

That these same lamas that helped rebuild monasteries in eastern Amdo went on to build relationships with the pastoralist polities around Lake Tsongön makes sense. It required significant funds to rebuild the monasteries in eastern Amdo, and the patron communities in the region were also devastated from the wars. Likewise, the Qing state was strapped for cash. It is likely that after the rebellions the state was unable to fulfill its post-1724 annual payments to the eastern Amdo monasteries, let alone foot the bill for the reconstruction of the monasteries. At a time when wars had ravaged the east and decimated the wealth of monastic institutions, the pastoralist polities represented a potential new source of offerings. Furthermore, the economic situation of the pastoralist polities was on the rise as international demand for wool surged and Chinese treaty ports had been forced into the international market.

<sup>69</sup> BDRC G163.

<sup>70</sup> BDRC G1917.

<sup>71</sup> Bse tshang 06 Blo bzang dpal ldan chos kyi rdo rje, *Skyabs rje A rol rin po che rje btsun blo bzang lung rtogs bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i rnam thar*, in *Gsung 'bun Blo bzang dpal ldan chos kyi rdo rje* (Pe cin: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2001), 6 vols., vol. 2: 204-5.

<sup>72</sup> Dge ming dpal, *Lha sde tsho brgyad kyi lo rgyus kun 'dus gsal ba'i me long*, 292.

During a period of relative calm following the defeat of the Great Northwestern Rebellion in 1874, a confluence of factors led to a booming wool trade for which the Tibetan communities living on the Tsongöñ grasslands supplied much of the wool. Beginning in the 1880s, international demand for wool began to surge driven by increased demand from U.S. and European carpet factories.<sup>73</sup> Foreign firms from the United States and Britain set up branches in China to procure the wool and ship it abroad. James Millward outlines four levels of place in this trade: producers' market towns where pastoralists traded the wool to merchants; local collection-transshipment centers where merchants bought wool from other merchants; regional collection-transshipment centers, e.g. Xining; and, finally, the export city of Tianjin.<sup>74</sup> The primary markets in Amdo at this time were Tongkor, Xining, and Lanzhou. Tibetan nomads traveled into these markets and stayed in trading inns oftentimes run by Hui Muslims. There were also important markets outside of Labrang and Kumbum monasteries.<sup>75</sup> Ragya monastery and Guide also served as important regional trading centers. Ragya's trading role is of interest as it became the mother monastery for many of the pastoralist polities' new monasteries, as we will discuss below. It served both as one of their trading centers and a place to train their monks. Muslim traders also traveled into pastoralist communities and stayed with hosts while engaging in trade, and these relationships between host and guest oftentimes became long-lasting.<sup>76</sup> Tibetans exchanged livestock, wool, hides, musk, and salt for tea, grain, and manufactures.

Several sources claim that Tibetans saw little profit and were swindled by Hui Muslim and Han Chinese traders.<sup>77</sup> Although it is likely that some traders made unscrupulous profits, there is good

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<sup>73</sup> For more on the wool trade, see James A Millward, "The Chinese Border Wool Trade of 1880-1937," in *The Legacy of Islam in China: An International Symposium in Memory of Joseph F. Fletcher*, ed. Dru C. Gladney (Harvard University Press, 1989); Horlemann, "Tibetan Nomadic Trade, the Chinese 'Xiejia' System and the Sino-Tibetan Border Market in Stong 'Khor/ Dan'Gaer In 19th/ 20th Century A Mdo"; Horlemann, "Tibetans and Muslims in Northwest China: Economic and Political Aspects of a Complex Historical Relationship"; and Jonathan Neaman Lipman, "The Border World of Gansu, 1895-1935," PhD diss., (Stanford University, 1981).

<sup>74</sup> Millward, "The Chinese Border Wool Trade of 1880-1937," 2.

<sup>75</sup> Horlemann, "Tibetan Nomadic Trade, the Chinese 'Xiejia' System and the Sino-Tibetan Border Market in Stong 'Khor/ Dan'gaer In 19th/ 20th Century A Mdo," 110.

<sup>76</sup> Ekvall, *Cultural Relations on the Kansu-Tibetan Border*, 54-55.

<sup>77</sup> See Horlemann, "Tibetan Nomadic Trade, the Chinese 'Xiejia' System and the Sino-Tibetan Border Market in Stong 'Khor/ Dan'gaer In 19th/ 20th Century A Mdo," 112, for several sources that discuss Hui Muslim and Han Chinese traders called "cunning foxes" who were reported to cheat Tibetans among others.

reason to doubt these claims give a comprehensive picture of the trade. First of all, they rely on stereotypes of nomads as dupes and Muslims as dishonest and conniving traders. Secondly, Tibetans showed signs of affluence during the wool boom. For example, Bianca Horlemann has noted how contemporary observers in the early twentieth century recorded the nomads' possession of expensive, modern firearms as opposed to the poor-quality guns they possessed at the end of the nineteenth century, their valuable jewelry, and a "higher social status" than Tibetan farmers.<sup>78</sup> Thirdly, Tibetans themselves traveled to markets and knew the selling prices for wool. For instance, the United States diplomat and Tibetologist, William Rockhill (1854-1914) observed Tibetans' unwillingness to sell wool at low rate in Guide in 1892:

The principal trade of Kuei-tê [Guide] is in lamb skins; a little musk is also brought here, and wool is becoming an important staple of trade, but the Tibetans have suddenly got such wild ideas of the great price foreigners are willing to pay for it, that they are holding it back and refusing to sell any for three or four times the price they would gladly have accepted three years ago.<sup>79</sup>

I contend that another indication of the wealth accrued by the communities is their construction of monasteries. Building a temple hall requires wood, stone, clay, artisans, and a large enough surplus that monks can ideally withdraw from herding and receive support from their families in monasteries.

#### *4. Case Studies of the Pastoralist Politics*

##### **The Atsok**

The Atsok (A tshogs) are part of a larger confederation called the Eight Lhadé Tsowa that migrated into Mongol bannerlands and stayed after 1860. In 1889, the Atsok founded their first monastery, Atsok Göñ Dechen Chökhör Ling (hereafter Atsok monastery; see Map 2),<sup>80</sup> on the banks of the Yellow River, just south of Karmo Yekhyil (Dkar mo g.yas 'khyil). The founder was Lama Konchok

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<sup>78</sup> Horlemann, "Tibetans and Muslims in Northwest China: Economic and Political Aspects of a Complex Historical Relationship," 166–67.

<sup>79</sup> William Woodville Rockhill, *Diary of a Journey Through Mongolia and Tibet in 1891 and 1892* (Smithsonian Institution, 1894), 90.

<sup>80</sup> BDRC G1918.

Chödar (Dkon mchog chos dar; 1854-1919),<sup>81</sup> who was born in the Atsok Risar (A tshogs Ri gsar) Tsowa and was the third incarnation of the founder of Geu Teng monastery.<sup>82</sup> He traveled to Ragya monastery and took full ordination vows from the Third Shingza Rinpoche, Lobzang Tenpé Wangchuk. Atsok monastery became a branch monastery of Ragya. The connection to Ragya monastery is significant and part of a larger pattern of monastic formation in the pasturelands south of Lake Tsongö in which most of the monasteries in the region became branches of Ragya.

Ragya monastery was also an important trading center. The botanist and explorer, Joseph Rock (1884-1962), observed that Muslim traders brought barley and tea to Ragya to trade for wool, butter, and cheese.<sup>83</sup> As monks from its branch monasteries frequently enrolled at Ragya, this created social ties between it and the patron communities of its branch monasteries, e.g. the Atsok and Ragya. Ragya's position as a trade center contributed to it becoming the mother monastery for many branch monasteries in the grassland communities that produced wool.<sup>84</sup>

Atsok monastery remained a modest institution for several decades; however, in the early twentieth century, the new Eight Lhadé Tsowa leader, Jangsem Bum (Byang sems 'bum; 1870-1944), significantly expanded it. Jangsem Bum's leadership marked a new kind of rule among the former Eight Lhadé Tsowa. His life and rise to power are instructive for understanding the political dynamics in grassland communities and the advent of monasteries in the region. Under his

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<sup>81</sup> Qinghai sheng bianji zu, ed., *Social and Historical Survey of Tibetans and Mongols in Qinghai Province* (Qinghai sheng zangzu mengguzu shehui lishi diaocha) (Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 2009), 20. Mtsho sngon zhing chen mtsho lho bod rig rang skyong khul nang bstan mthun tshogs, Krung go bod brgyud btho rim nang bstan slob gling, and Nang bstan zhib 'jug khang, eds., *Mtsho Lho Bod rigs rang skyong khul gyi dgon sde khag gi lo rgyus snying bsdu*s (Zi ling: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1999), 622, gives a birth year of 1812, but this is probably an error.

<sup>82</sup> Dge ming dpal, *Lha sde tsho brgyad kyi lo rgyus kun 'dus gsal ba'i me long*, 295-97.

<sup>83</sup> Joseph F. Rock, *The Amnye Ma-chhen Range and Adjacent Regions: A Monographic Study*. (Rome: Is. M.E.O., 1956), 66.

<sup>84</sup> More research is needed to better understand the economic relationship between Ragya and the vast network of communities that built its branch monasteries. It is clear, however, that high lamas visited these communities and collected donations and that nearby communities with branch monasteries traded at Ragya. It is possible that monks from Ragya went on trade trips to affiliated communities on behalf of the monastery, as monks from Kumbum did, but this requires more research. See the discussion of Kumbum monks ("lamas") going on trade trips for their monasteries by the Catholic missionary Louis Schram, who lived in Amdo from 1911-1922 Louis Schram, *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier* (Xining: Plateau Pub., 2006), 349-50.

reign, the Atsok became the most powerful group within the Eight Lhadé Tsowa. Jangsem Bum was born into a relatively wealthy family in the Atsok Tsowa and ordained as a monk at Ragya. He was a charismatic speaker and put his oratory skills to use, accumulating wealth by mediating conflicts, including a 1903 battle between the Wongtak (Bong stag) and Eight Lhadé Tsowa. He also reportedly participated in raiding and reprisals against other tsowa, earning quite a reputation for his bravery.<sup>85</sup>

Jangsem Bum's rise resulted from a conflict between the Ma rulers in Xining and the Eight Lhadé Tsowa. As the Ma family began to consolidate power in 1912 when Ma Qi (1869-1931) became the Xining military commander, they began to wrest control of trade in the region. The Eight Lhadé Tsowa experienced this firsthand when in 1913, a group of their prominent members, including their current chiliarch, Chortsang Troben (Phyor gtsang khro ban), traveled to Ragya for business. On the way, they encountered a group of Xining-based Hui merchants traveling to Songpan. They killed seven of the Hui merchants, stole 200 of their pack horses as well as a number of valuable items. The merchants who escaped returned to Xining and reported the attack, whereupon Ma Qi sent people to investigate the matter. In 1914, he sent more than 1,000 troops under the command of Ma Lin to attack the Eight Lhadé Tsowa. The Eight Lhadé Tsowa's chiliarch, Chortsang Troben, and his son were killed.<sup>86</sup>

Following this incident, there are two different versions of what occurred. In one version, Jangsem Bum, not yet the chiliarch, helped mediate peace between Ma's forces and the Eight Lhadé Tsowa. In another version of events, Jangsem Bum actually aided Ma's forces when they invaded. Regardless of this discrepancy, his role in the conflict and its mediation led to his appointment to chiliarch in 1916 by the Ma regime. In 1918, the Ma regime stationed a small garrison in Atsok territory, specifically at Daheba in present-day Xinghai County. The Ma regime used the garrison as a mid-point for military operations from Xining to Yushu and Golok.<sup>87</sup> Jangsem Bum would go on to serve as a senator (Ch. *canyiyuan*) in the Qinghai government and had an office in Xining.<sup>88</sup> These were significant interventions in local politics and demonstrate that Ma Qi's administration in

<sup>85</sup> Qinghai sheng bianji zu, ed., *Social and Historical Survey of Tibetans and Mongols in Qinghai Province* (Qinghai sheng zangzu mengguzu shehui lishi diaocha), 19-20. See also Dge ming dpal, *Lha sde tsho bryad kyi lo rgyus kun 'dus gsal ba'i me long*, 52-56.

<sup>86</sup> Dge ming dpal, *Lha sde tsho bryad kyi lo rgyus kun 'dus gsal ba'i me long*, 51.

<sup>87</sup> Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi, ed., *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji*, vol. 3 (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1963), 112.

<sup>88</sup> Dge ming dpal, *Lha sde tsho bryad kyi lo rgyus kun 'dus gsal ba'i me long*, 56.

Qinghai had developed an unprecedented political reach. During the Qing dynasty, officials were unable to select rulers in these communities and, instead, fought them during times of war or recognized them as centurions (Ch. *baihu*) or chiliarchs (Ch. *qianhu*) in times of peace. Through maintaining peaceful relations with the Ma regime while consolidating his own local power through Atsok monastery, Jangsem Bum would go on to become a powerful figure until his death nearly thirty years later.

A few years after receiving the chiliarch title, Jangsem Bum moved to Atsok monastery and took charge of it when its founder went to Ditsa for study.<sup>89</sup> As such, he assumed the roles of religious and political leader, although he delegated control of day-to-day responsibilities to his nephew. Jangsem Bum sought to increase the size and power of Atsok monastery and in doing so, increased his own power as well. He reportedly instituted a monk tax to increase the number of monks, restricted monks from returning to lay life, greatly expanded the number of buildings at Atsok monastery, and made lavish donations to other monasteries.<sup>90</sup> Although the monk population is not known during Jangsem Bum's reign, in 1958 Atsok monastery had about 250 monks.<sup>91</sup> The Atsok, along with other tsowa in the region, were also major sponsors of Drakkar Trel dzong monastery (f. 1924).

Atsok monastery, like all of the new pastoralist monasteries, implicated communities into a reciprocal relationship with the institution and bound them to it as its patrons, which in turn bound the communities to the secular leader, who was the monastery's primary patron. The relationship between the monastery and its communities was at once religious, economic, social, and political. Atsok monastery generated considerable revenue by renting out livestock and pasture, granting high-interest loans, chanting, performing ceremonies e.g. funerals, using unpaid labor, and collecting regular donations.<sup>92</sup> Some communities were obligated to pay outright taxes, and many communities were expected to contribute religious donations

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<sup>89</sup> Dge ming dpal, *Lha sde tsho bgyad kyi lo rgyus kun 'dus gsal ba'i me long*, 53. Another version is that he took charge of the monastery when the founder died in 1921, a couple of years after the founder died; see Qinghai sheng bianji zu, *Social and Historical Survey of Tibetans and Mongols in Qinghai Province* (Qinghai sheng zangzu mengguzu shehui lishi diaocha), 20.

<sup>90</sup> Qinghai sheng bianji zu, *Social and Historical Survey of Tibetans and Mongols in Qinghai Province* (Qinghai sheng zangzu mengguzu shehui lishi diaocha), 20.

<sup>91</sup> Pu Wencheng, ed., *Tibetan Buddhist Temples of Gansu and Qinghai Provinces* (Gan Qing zang chuan fo jiao si yuan) (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1990), 229.

<sup>92</sup> Qinghai sheng bianji zu, *Social and Historical Survey of Tibetans and Mongols in Qinghai Province* (Qinghai sheng zangzu mengguzu shehui lishi diaocha), 14-15.

and boys to become monks. In turn, monasteries were expected to provide religious services, be a source of virtue and general welfare for the community, take in monks, and provide mediation during disputes. The disparate patron communities were linked together as part of a monastery's network and as a political community. The monastic network was activated during specific events, for example, in war when patron communities were expected to send men to the monastery to fight or during holiday festivals in which communities were obligated to provide material support to the monastery.

Furthermore, a monastery could serve as the basis for the expansion of a polity's territory. In the 1920s, Atsok monastery began encroaching on the pastureland of Karmo Yekhyil. Karmo Yekhyil is a fertile area lying along the western bank of the Yellow River which borders Atsok monastery. Prior to 1921, Karmo Yekhyil was pastureland, and the monks cultivated only a few *mu* of it around the monastery.<sup>93</sup> However, as the monk population increased under Jangsem Bum's policies, they began cultivating more and more land. Jangsem Bum also recruited people from other regions including Tibetan, Hui, and Han Chinese farmers to build houses, turn up the soil, and cultivate crops. By 1935, it was a hamlet with dozens of households, and the farmed land under his control had increased to more than 1,700 *mu*.

Sometimes rulers displace existing communities. For example, when the Atsok were expanding into Karmo Yekhyil, they also started a conflict with the Jatang Tsowa (Bya thang tsho ba) in order to eventually take over their territory. The Jatang was composed of around fifty or sixty households engaged in farming. In 1925, the Atsok began grazing their livestock on Jatang territory, provoking a response. The conflict lasted several years, and casualties mounted on both sides. In 1929, the Jatang population had grown very small, so they fled their territory altogether. Jangsem Bum invited many different groups of farmers to this region, as he did in Karmo Yekhyil, and he sent officials to collect taxes there. The Jatang were also required to sponsor an annual recitation of the Kanjur. By 1949, the population had grown to more than 50 households, and the territory encompassed more than 1,700 *mu*.<sup>94</sup>

Many of the people immigrating into the Atsok polity were poor or fleeing warfare and wound up as *tawa* (*mtha' ba*), meaning "those [living] on the edge [of the monastery]." In other regions, *tawa* re-

<sup>93</sup> This was a land measurement that varied over time but was roughly 1/6 of an acre.

<sup>94</sup> Qinghai sheng bianji zu, *Social and Historical Survey of Tibetans and Mongols in Qinghai Province* (Qinghai sheng zangzu mengguzu shehui lishi diaocha), 20.



ferred to merchant communities outside of monasteries, but in this region the term referred to families that were destitute without home or resources. There were about 50 of these tawa households living around Atsok monastery by the 1950s. They worked for the monastery performing tasks such as collecting water, and milking and slaughtering livestock in exchange for a place to stay and a share of the dairy products they produced.

Jangsem Bum also actively courted the members of other Tibetan tsowa to join the Atsok. Many of these communities, like the tawa, immigrated into the region during periods of conflict and political unrest in their homelands, but rather than becoming tawa, they became sub-divisions of existing tsowa.

The story of Jangsem Bum is one of an ordinary man rising into a powerful leader through the skillful expansion of Atsok monastery during a prosperous time. He was a clever and charismatic figure, and these traits helped him excel as a mediator between tsowa and the Ma regime. He recognized the power that a strong monastery could provide him and built up Atsok monastery, which both strengthened the ties between the polity's individual tsowa and established the polity's territory.

## The Kangtsa

The Kangtsa lived in southern Trika (Ch. Guide)<sup>95</sup> before migrating north of Lake Tsongön in the nineteenth century.<sup>96</sup> They had their own namesake monasteries in Trika, Lower Kangtsa monastery.<sup>97</sup> Some of their monks also enrolled at nearby Nyegön monastery,<sup>98</sup> which was a branch of Lamo Dechen.

In the early nineteenth century when conflict was commonplace

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<sup>95</sup> BDRC G1136. Present-day Trika County (Ch. Guide xian) occupies a portion of the cultural region of Trika.

<sup>96</sup> There also communities of Kangtsa living in present-day Xunhua County and Dzorgé County that are believed to have migrated earlier during the sixteenth century Mongol conquests in Tsongön. See Rgya po and Tshul khriims, *Mtsho sngon po'i Rkang tsha'i lo rgyus mes po'i zhal lung*, 8. Additionally, some of the Kangtsa group that migrated north of Lake Tsongön in the nineteenth century remained in Trika.

<sup>97</sup> BDRC G1862.

<sup>98</sup> BDRC G1858. Nyegön monastery still today receives monks from the Kangtsa who remained in Trika and from the Kangtsa who settled north of Lake Tsongön. See *Mtsho sngon zhing chen mtsho lho bod rig rang skyong khul nang bstan mthun tshogs*, *Krung go bod brgyud btho rim nang bstan slob gling*, and *Nang bstan zhib 'jug khang*, *Mtsho lho Bod rigs rang skyong khul gyi dgon sde khag gi lo rgyus snying bsdus*, 156. This was also confirmed to me by a monk at the monastery when I visited it in 2024.

between Tibetan communities and Mongol banners, some Mongols conspired with a Chinese official in Xining. The official summoned the Kangtsa leaders under the pretense of a robbery lawsuit. Allegedly, he prepared a banquet, and after they had gotten drunk, he had them all executed.<sup>99</sup>

The Kangtsa became weak at this time without their leaders and were a target of constant raiding, causing them to scatter more. When a Kangtsa monk living in Nyegön monastery in Trika, Lama Rabten (1814-1893), heard of the plight of his community, he reportedly gathered two other Kangtsa monks in the monastery and said to them, "While the situation of us Kangtsa has become so bad, why do we remain here? Shouldn't we return [to the grasslands of Lake Tsongön], rule our own territory, and deliver vengeance on our enemies?" The three went before the master of Nyegön monastery, the Third Nyé Drubchen, Tenpé Gyeltsen (1802-1849),<sup>100</sup> and he approved of their plan.<sup>101</sup>

In 1830, Lama Rabten disrobed, organized a military force, and headed north across the Yellow River. His forces attacked Mongol groups and drove them from the land. After taking back the Kangtsa lands north of Lake Tsongön, numerous Kangtsa tsowa who had been living south of the Yellow River began to migrate there. By 1860, the Qing recognized the right of several other Tibetan communities to reside in the lands surrounding Lake Tsongön. When Lama Rabten's forces arrived on the banks north of Lake Tsongön, they consisted of the six original Kangtsa Tsowa (*tsho sgo drug*) and approximately ten other tsowa. Following this, more and more tsowa migrated to join the Kangtsa, leading to pasture becoming scarcer but an increase in the number of people under the Kangtsa's authority.

Neten Wangyel (1879-1933) rose to power as chiliarch some years after the death of Chiliarch Chakgyel (Lcags rgyal), whose death is discussed below. Neten Wangyel was not in the direct lineage of the previous chiliarch. His father was a member of the Yungrong (G.yung rong) Tsowa—a tsowa within the Kangtsa polity—and his mother was from the Arik. When he came to power, the numerous tsowa constituting the Kangtsa had begun breaking into smaller

<sup>99</sup> Rgya po and Tshul khirms, *Mtsho sngon po'i Rkang tsha'i lo rgyus mes po'i zhal lung*, 9.

<sup>100</sup> BDRC P1262. Mtsho sngon zhing chen mtsho lho bod rig rang skyong khul nang bstan mthun tshogs, Krung go bod brgyud btho rim nang bstan slob gling, and Nang bstan zhib 'jug khang, *Mtsho lho Bod rigs rang skyong khul gyi dgon sde khag gi lo rgyus snying bsdu*, 157–58.

<sup>101</sup> Rgya po and Tshul khirms, *Mtsho sngon po'i Rkang tsha'i lo rgyus mes po'i zhal lung*, 16–17.

groups and occupying the pastures they wanted without answering to a Kangtsa leader. In order to unite the various tsowa, Neten Wangyel thought that it was necessary for the tsowa to have a common monastery.<sup>102</sup>

In order to find a lama to establish the monastery, Neten Wangyel went to Ditsa monastery (f. 1903), and he met with its founder, The Fourth Amdo Zhamar Rinpoche, Gendun Tendzin, who we saw earlier was a student of Shingza Rinpoche and the Second Arol Rinpoche. The Amdo Zhamar advised Neten Wangyel that he should invite Sera Khyenpa Jikmé Gyatso (Se ra'i mkhyen pa 'jigs med rgya mtsho) to found the monastery in Kangtsa. The resulting monastery, Kangtsa Göichen, was completed in 1915. Kangtsa Göichen was offered as a branch monastery of Ditsa, and at its height in the 1940s, it had over 200 monks.<sup>103</sup>

After founding Kangtsa Göichen, Neten Wangyel was able to call all of the Kangtsa tsowa together to establish rules concerning the boundaries between tsowa's pastures. He also instituted a system in which tsowa were not allowed to freely use pastures according to their private interests. He had a jail and a court built as well as a manor for his residence. He also prohibited the hunting of wildlife in Kangtsa territory. When he visited the Ninth Panchen Lama at Kumbum, Neten Wangyel offered the merit from this prohibition to the Ninth Panchen Lama (1883-1937), who in turn is said to have praised him as a good leader.<sup>104</sup>

## The Khyamru

The connection between local deity, monastic establishment, tulkus, major monasteries, and polity formation is perhaps most evident among the Khyamru ('Khyam ru).<sup>105</sup> The Khyamru, whose name literally means "wandering group," attribute their name to being driven out of their lands during different periods of Mongol rule in

<sup>102</sup> Rgya po and Tshul khriims, *Mtsho sngon po'i Rkang tsha'i lo rgyus mes po'i zhal lung*, 23-25.

<sup>103</sup> Rgya po and Tshul khriims, *Mtsho sngon po'i Rkang tsha'i lo rgyus mes po'i zhal lung*, 23, 110-13.

<sup>104</sup> Rgya po and Tshul khriims, *Mtsho sngon po'i Rkang tsha'i lo rgyus mes po'i zhal lung*, 23-25. I have not been able to determine the date of this event. The Ninth Panchen Lama fled Tibet in 1923 after a dispute with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, but did not pass through Kumbum. In 1935, he arrived at Kumbum and stayed for there a year before heading back to Tibet, but Neten Wangyel had already died two years before this in 1933. See Fabienne Jagou, *The Ninth Panchen Lama (1883-1937): A Life at the Crossroads of Sino-Tibetan Relations* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême; Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2011), 58, 97-101, and 139-41.

<sup>105</sup> This name is also spelled as 'Khyams ru.

Tsongön and living in unfixed locations.<sup>106</sup> They are also called the Chinyinlung (Spyi nyin lung). They believe that “*chi*,” meaning leader, refers to the ruling lineage, and “*nyinlung*,” meaning sunny valley, refers to a place they lived for many years, the sunny side of Zabmonak (Zab mo nags).<sup>107</sup>

The Khyamru migrated numerous times south of the Yellow River, eventually moving from Zabmonak to Mangra.<sup>108</sup> In 1813, when the Third Jamyang Zhepa, Tubten Jikme Gyatso (1792-1855),<sup>109</sup> was on his way back to Amdo from Central Tibet, he stayed with the Khyamru, made them religious objects, and encouraged them to build a monastery. The Khyamru built a temple, and Alak Tsultrim Nyendrak Gyatso took charge of it.<sup>110</sup> The legendary yogi, Shabkar,<sup>111</sup> passed through the Khyamru and Kangtsa territory while they were both still in the Mangra region in the early nineteenth century.<sup>112</sup> During an 1821 incursion into the grasslands around Lake Tsongön, the Khyamru established a tent monastery north of the river. Gradually, they built it into a permanent monastery, though the precise timeline for this is unclear. In order to establish it as a permanent monastery, the Khyamru had to secure access to the land.

After the Khyamru began settling in Mongol bannerlands north of the river, Alak Tsultrim Nyendrak Gyatso, who held considerable

<sup>106</sup> Blo bzang byang chub, *Spyi nyin lung 'khyam ru'i dpon skor gyi lo rgyus khri gshog rgyal mo'i gzi byin* (Xianggang: Xianggang tianma tushu youxian gongsi, n.d.), 44-45.

<sup>107</sup> Blo bzang byang chub, *Spyi nyin lung 'khyam ru'i dpon skor gyi lo rgyus khri gshog rgyal mo'i gzi byin*, 44-45.

<sup>108</sup> BDRC G1281. There is a present-day county named after the region, Mangra County (Ch. Guinan).

<sup>109</sup> BDRC P124. Pu Wencheng, *Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries of Gansu and Qinghai (Gan-Qing Zang chuan fo jiao si yuan)*, 234.

<sup>110</sup> Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, *Mdo smad chos 'byung*, ed. Smon lam rgya mtsho (Lan kru'u: Kan su'u mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1982 [1864]), 268. Alak Tsultrim was born into a *tsowa* that was subordinate to the Khyamru, and he entered Lamo Dechen at young age. He became a renowned scholar there and was its 34<sup>th</sup> abbot; see Mtsho sngon zhing chen mtsho lho bod rig rang skyong khul nang bstan mthun tshogs, Krung go bod brgyud btho rim nang bstan slob gling, and Nang bstan zhib 'jug khang, *Mtsho lho Bod rigs rang skyong khul gyi dgon sde khag gi lo rgyus snying bsdus*, 357; Zla ba tshe ring, *La mo bde chen chos 'khor gling gi lo rgyus* (Pe cin: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2014), 121.

<sup>111</sup> BDRC P287.

<sup>112</sup> Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, *Mdo smad chos 'byung*, 268; Zhabs dkar ba tshogs drug rang grol, 'Gro ba mgon zhabs dkar ba'i sku tshe'i smad kyi rnam thar thog mtha'i bar du dge ba yid bzhin nor bu dgos 'dod kun 'byung, in *Gsung 'bum tshogs drug rang grol*, (Zi ling: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2002), 10 vols., vol. 2: 165.

political power in the community,<sup>113</sup> entered negotiations with the local Mongol leader, and in order to clear the blood debt for all the bannermen killed and to purchase their land, he paid 10,000 sheep, 1,000 black yak, twenty fifty-ounce pieces of silver,<sup>114</sup> among other items.<sup>115</sup> In addition to offering the Mongol leader livestock, gold and silver to leave, another modern source relates that Alak Tsultrim secured the return of the Mongols' horses, which had previously been stolen by another Tibetan pastoralist group, the Wongtak. After returning the horses, he reportedly told the Mongol leader, "If you stay on this land of unruly Tibetans, the outcome will not be good."<sup>116</sup>

The monastery is colloquially known as Khyamru monastery, and it received its full name, Khyamru Göṅ Trashi Gepel Ling, from the Third Jamyang Zhepa. The twelve Khyamru tsowa became its patrons, or "base of offerings" (*mchod gzhi*).<sup>117</sup> In 1861, the monastery received an official seal from the Xining Amban in 1861.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>113</sup> For example, Alak Tsultrim received the title of either Great Jasak Lama (*jasag da bla ma*; Ch. *zhasake da lama*) or Jasak Lama (Ch. *zhasak lama*). Great Jasak Lama was the highest of four ranks given to reincarnate lamas by the Qing Dynasty; see Kim, "Preliminary Notes on Lamo Dechen Monastery and Its Two Main Incarnation Lineages," 86n26. Interestingly one source claims that the Jamyang Zhepa bestowed it on him in 1861, which must be an error because he died in 1855 (Mtsho sngon zhing chen mtsho lho bod rig rang skyong khul nang bstan mthun tshogs, Krung go bod brgyud btho rim nang bstan slob gling, and Nang bstan zhib 'jug khang, *Mtsho lho Bod rigs rang skyong khul gyi dgon sde khag gi lo rgyus snying bsdus*, 358). Another source claims Alak Tsultrim received the title, without specifying who bestowed it, in 1813, the same year that Jamyang Zhepa passed through the Khyamru community in Mangra. After this, Alak Tsultrim proceeded to build a temple (*lha khang*) there (Pu Wencheng, *Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries of Gansu and Qinghai (Gan-Qing Zang chuan fo jiao si yuan)*, 234). Alak Tsultrim is also mentioned seizing

<sup>114</sup> The unit in this passage is unclear and not technically ounces (*dngrul lnga bcu ma nyi shu*).

<sup>115</sup> Mtsho sngon zhing chen mtsho lho bod rig rang skyong khul nang bstan mthun tshogs, Krung go bod brgyud btho rim nang bstan slob gling, and Nang bstan zhib 'jug khang, *Mtsho lho Bod rigs rang skyong khul gyi dgon sde khag gi lo rgyus snying bsdus*, 357-8.

<sup>116</sup> Blo bzang byang chub, *Spyi nyin lung 'khyam ru'i dpon skor gyi lo rgyus khri gshog rgyal mo'i gzi byin*, 71-72.

<sup>117</sup> Mtsho sngon zhing chen mtsho lho bod rig rang skyong khul nang bstan mthun tshogs, Krung go bod brgyud btho rim nang bstan slob gling, and Nang bstan zhib 'jug khang, *Mtsho lho Bod rigs rang skyong khul gyi dgon sde khag gi lo rgyus snying bsdus*, 350-1. The term *mchod gzhi* is often translated as "monastic estates" in Central Tibet, but I have translated it more literally here because of the agricultural connotations of the term.

<sup>118</sup> Pu Wencheng, *Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries of Gansu and Qinghai (Gan-Qing Zang chuan fo jiao si yuan)*, 234; Blo bzang byang chub, *Spyi nyin lung 'khyam ru'i dpon skor gyi lo rgyus khri gshog rgyal mo'i gzi byin*, 72-73.

After the Khyamru crossed the river, their leader was Nyingchukgyel (Snying phyug rgyal, b. 1820). Under his rule, their territory greatly expanded. As they settled, a dispute arose over grasslands between the Khyamru and another group, the Gomé Karji (Sgo me dkar brjid). Tongkor Rinpoche's treasurer, who held close relations with the Qing authorities, requested that they side with the Khyamru. Additionally, one of the Khyamru member's, Sölo (Bsod lo), was a skilled speaker, so the Khyamru prevailed in the lawsuit. After this, the Xining Amban conferred the title of chiliarch on Sölo. Sölo and the community then built a laptsé for the Khyamru's natal deity, Lönpo Serchen (Blon po gser can) in their new territory.<sup>119</sup>

The Khyamru, like the Kangtsa, established a strong relationship with the Fourth Amdo Zhamar after settling north of the river. Chiliarch Sölo married Luwang Tsomo (Klu dbang mtsho mo), and together they had four children, two daughters and two sons. In 1879, Zhamar Rinpoche advised the youngest son of the Khyamru chiliarch, Bumkyong Tsering ('Bum skyong tshe ring, b. 1860), to marry Lhamtsho (Lha mtsho), the daughter of a prominent man in the Kangtsa polity named Nya Sengchen (Gnya' seng chen).<sup>120</sup> Bumkyong Tsering succeeded his father as chiliarch, and under his leadership, the Khyamru incorporated more than 16 large communities (*tsho chen*) and many other small communities. The Khyamru leader maintained an inner circle of leaders from these numerous communities. The Khyamru communities entered a priest-patron relationship with the Amdo Zhamar and were major donors for the establishment of Ditsa monastery, which he founded in 1903. At this time, the Khyamru also held an extensive ritual at the laptsé for Lönpo Serchen, and the respective tsowa within the Khyamru built laptsé for their deities. For three days, they hosted festivities including horse races, shooting competitions, singing, and dancing. The lamas, monks, and leaders also held meetings about Khyamru affairs. The festivities concluded with Tarshul Rinpoche offering the Kalacakra empowerment and Chiliarch Bumkyong Tsering and his father, the former chiliarch, dressed in their regalia and making vast offerings to the lama.<sup>121</sup>

Chiliarch Bumkyong Tsering also mediated disputes. In one incident, he is said to have settled a matter between a farming and pas-

<sup>119</sup> Blo bzang byang chub, *Spyi nyin lung 'khyam ru'i dpon skor gyi lo rgyus khri gshog rgyal mo'i gzi byin*, 73–74.

<sup>120</sup> Nya Sengchen is also known as Nya Kelzang (Gnya' skal bzang) and was the leader of the Nya Zholma, or Lower Nya, tsowa. Rgya po and Tshul khriims, *Mtsho sngon po'i Rkang tsha'i lo rgyus mes po'i zhal lung*, 96.

<sup>121</sup> Blo bzang byang chub, *Spyi nyin lung 'khyam ru'i dpon skor gyi lo rgyus khri gshog rgyal mo'i gzi byin*, 74–76.

toralist community by prohibiting an armed monk from collecting revenue from them. His official recognition as the chiliarch by the Qing reinforced his authority. In another incident in 1908, some members of the Mengak (Dme sngags) were raiding cattle from the Kangtsa, and the Kangtsa chiliarch, Chakgyel, came to help. He was killed while fighting with the bandits. In the aftermath, Bumkyong Tsering asked the Fourth Amdo Zhamar to mediate the dispute, which resulted in the Mengak surrendering to the Khyamru and becoming one of their tsowa.<sup>122</sup>

Like his father, Bumkyong Tsering's son, Lubha (Klu b+ha), also married a Kangtsa woman, Lutso Gyal (Klu mtsho rgyal), and he also maintained retinue of leaders from the many different tsowa within the Khyamru polity.<sup>123</sup> Through the patronage of Khyamru monastery, their relationship with their natal deity, and acting as patrons of Amdo Zhamar, the Khyamru territorialized their land.

### Conclusion

The decline of the Mongol banners and Qing power in the nineteenth century presented an opportunity for Tibetan pastoralist communities to gradually encroach on, invade, and settle the Mongol banner lands before negotiating a resolution with Qing officials that recognized their land claims and allowed them to participate again in the border trade. The violent incursion of imperialist powers and international markets into China at once weakened the Qing state while also generating wealth for pastoralists, who were able to benefit from the international wool boom. Meanwhile, the Great Northwestern Rebellion pushed prominent lamas, who were based in eastern Amdo but hailed from the grasslands, to find new patron communities, establish relationships with the new pastoralist polities, and support their establishment of local monasteries. The pastoralist polities engaged in a practice of territorialization through the establishment of monasteries, the propitiation of territorial deities, and joining the monastic networks of the prominent lamas. All of the developments together represented a structural shift on the grasslands from banner to pastoralist polity. Mongol Jasaks were eclipsed by Tibetan chiliarchs, and the new political leadership relied on build-

<sup>122</sup> Blo bzang byang chub, *Spyi nyin lung 'khyam ru'i dpon skor gyi lo rgyus khri gshog rgyal mo'i gzi byin*, 76–77; Rgya po and Tshul khri ms, *Mtsho sngon po'i Rkang tsha'i lo rgyus mes po'i zhal lung*, 22.

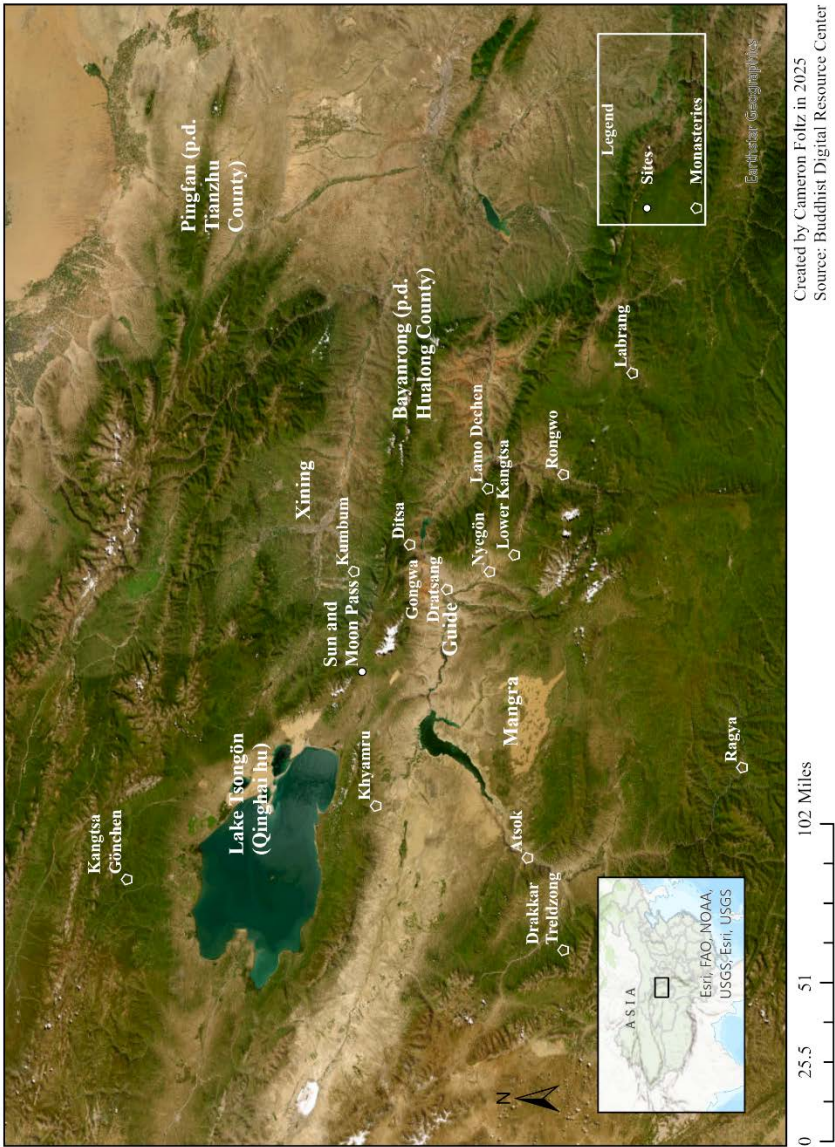
<sup>123</sup> Blo bzang byang chub, *Spyi nyin lung 'khyam ru'i dpon skor gyi lo rgyus khri gshog rgyal mo'i gzi byin*, 77–79.

ing local monasteries to structure their polities. As a result, these grasslands and eastern Amdo became much more tightly connected through monastic networks.





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