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# CROSS-CURRENTS



## EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

### **Victorianizing Guangxu: Arresting Flows, Minting Coins, and Exerting Authority in Early Twentieth-Century Kham**

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#### **Abstract**

In the late Qing and early Republican eras, eastern Tibet (Kham) was a borderland on the cusp of political and economic change. Straddling Sichuan Province and central Tibet, it was coveted by both Chengdu and Lhasa. Informed by an absolutist conception of territorial sovereignty, Sichuan officials sought to exert exclusive authority in Kham by severing its inhabitants from regional and local influence. The resulting efforts to arrest the flow of rupees from British India and the flow of cultural identity entwined with Buddhism from Lhasa were grounded in two misperceptions: that Khampa opposition to Chinese rule was external, fostered solely by local monasteries as conduits of Lhasa's spiritual authority, and that Sichuan could arrest such influence, the absence of which would legitimize both exclusive authority in Kham and regional assertions of sovereignty. The intersection of these misperceptions with the significance of Buddhism in Khampa identity determined the success of Sichuan's policies and the focus of this article, the minting and circulation of the first and only Qing coin emblazoned with an image of the emperor. It was a flawed axiom of state and nation builders throughout the world that severing local cultural or spiritual influence was possible—or even necessary—to effect a borderland's incorporation.

**Keywords:** Sichuan, southwest China, Tibet, currency, Indian rupee, territorial sovereignty, Qing borderlands

On December 24, 1904, after an arduous fourteen-week journey along the southern road linking Chengdu with Lhasa, recently appointed assistant *amban* (Imperial Resident) to Tibet Fengquan reached Batang, a lush green valley at the western edge of Sichuan on the province's border with central Tibet. A fearless and diligent official, Fengquan had a successful history of suppressing bandits. Most recently serving as commissioner of Chengdu's new police force, he was accustomed to bending the will of both his own men and his opponents, and was described by fellow officials as occasionally displaying an arrogant streak ("Duxian zou" 1905; NA, "Thibetan Affairs": FO 228/1549). This character trait was on display when he was greeted on

the outskirts of Batang by the polity's two *dépa* (governor and vice-governor) and a group of local headmen. As the welcoming party kowtowed, Fengquan did not allow them to rise. Instead, he stepped forward, extended the long stem of his cigarette filter, and rapped the red, plumed cap atop the head of senior *dépa* Tashi Jetsun (Luo Jinbao). "How is it that a barbarian dog can sport a red button and a peacock feather atop his head?" he asked. "I can see that your yak butter-smearred cap will not stay on your head for long!"<sup>1</sup> (*Batang xianzhi* 1993, 251). Both *dépa* held *tusi* (native official) titles, typically wore Qing official dress, had adopted Han Chinese names, and had been described by the local Qing official as "loyal and submissive" ("Weiguan Batang" 1904). Yet, in Fengquan's eyes, they were little more than impostors.

This encounter speaks to the power of perception to influence action, even when confronted with a perhaps discordant reality. Despite the outward appearance of these two *dépa*, Fengquan "knew" that Khampa Tibetans were uncivilized; every book or memorial he had read confirmed this. Thus, in his view, merely donning Qing imperial garb, topped with a peacock feather, or adopting a Chinese name was insufficient to demonstrate a Khampa ruler's embrace of "civilization," and thus his absolute submission to the Qing. Similarly, demarcating external borders, replacing these same native rulers with magistrates from *neidi*,<sup>2</sup> and designating new Chinese county names was not enough to render the polities of Kham integral parts of Sichuan, the Qing, and later Republican states, nor make their inhabitants "Chinese" (see also Lin 2006; Leibold 2007, esp. chapter 2). Each of these actions was superficial, with Qing and Republican officials neglecting the cultural self-conception of those inhabiting the renamed spaces of Kham, and the native rulers concealing their cultural core. Fengquan's perhaps astute presumption that, despite titles and seals, the Qing had yet to transform the core identity of the two *dépa* who lay prostrate before him parallels the belief of his successors in Kham, first among them Zhao Erfeng, who perceived acculturating the commoners of Kham as crucial to his own endeavor's success. The policies of Zhao and other Qing and Republican Chinese officials in the wake of Fengquan's slaughter the following April, however, were betrayed by the rigidity of this very perception—that the Khampas could not both revere the Dalai Lama and submit to the emperor or be patriotic citizens of the Republic of China (ROC). In other words, they could not be both culturally Tibetan and politically Chinese. It was a common perception of nineteenth- and twentieth-century state builders in newly incorporated spaces around the globe that the identity

of the borderland population needed to be changed in order to render the borderland an integral part of the state (see, for instance, Harrell 1995; Lary 2007, 6–8).

This unidimensional conception of identity was a response to the geopolitical position in the early twentieth century of Kham, which lay at the edge of Qing imperial and state space, situated between Sichuan and central Tibet along the empire's southwestern border with British India. Informed by their adoption of an absolutist conception of territorial sovereignty, Sichuan officials in the late Qing and early Republican eras sought to shield Kham from all external influences and to exclude any challenge to their exercise of authority over the territory and its inhabitants, an exclusive authority legitimated only by the absence of such challenges. The resulting policies were premised on two intertwined misperceptions. The first, evident in Fengquan's initial encounter with the *dépa* and his tumultuous tenure in Batang, was the widespread conceit that Khampa opposition to Qing and Republican policies was solely external, the influence of the monasteries of Kham as conduits of the spiritual—and subversive—authority of the Dalai Lama. This misperception was based on a flawed understanding of the character of the Khampas—that their identity was malleable—and an implicit rejection of the validity of a competing set of cultural mores.

The second misperception was grounded in an absolutist conception of territorial sovereignty adapted by the gentry and officials of Sichuan to address their tenuous authority in Kham. This was derived from the ideal Euro-American rhetoric of international law introduced to China in the late nineteenth century. Under this conception, the gentry and officials believed that the provincial government possessed the power to arrest undesirable and threatening external flows, material or otherwise, across newly delineated and strengthened borders encircling the Kham borderlands. Whereas the British Indian challenge to Chinese authority was limited largely to the realm of commerce, Lhasa's spiritual challenge was more fundamental, threatening to obstruct Qing- and Republican-era efforts to incorporate Kham and its inhabitants into the burgeoning Chinese state and nation. Simultaneously dependent on and indicative of the exercise of exclusive authority in the borderlands, this presumed power was fundamental to policies enacted to thwart both regional and local challenges, yet it was ultimately incapable of excluding all external influences from Kham.

The question of whether a state government's effort to exercise absolute and exclusive authority in its borderlands necessitated the region's isolation from the external flow of

competing political, social, and economic influences is central to understanding the borderland's role in state building and state consolidation. Borderland scholars since Peter Sahlins (1989) have challenged the narrative that the state center dominated and transformed its peripheral regions. As Mark Elliott (2014, 345–346) aptly points out in the context of Qing studies, imperial discourse cannot be taken at face value. Recent scholarship (e.g., Perdue 2005; Giersch 2006; Lary 2007) on the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century incorporation of Qing borderlands and their important role in the later formation of the Chinese nation-state demonstrates the resilience of borderland societies confronted with the Qing central government's often assimilative policies. The resulting dynamism in borderland regions had a profound effect on local identity and the character of the Chinese nation-state. Yet in the wake of Taiwan's 1895 cession to Meiji Japan and European imperialism's subsequent intensified effort to carve spheres of territorial influence across the empire, convergence of the globalizing norm of territorial sovereignty with heightened fear of territorial encroachment on the plateau from British India or Russia foreclosed acceptance of such dynamism in Kham. An absolutist conception of the norm adopted by Sichuan officials equated demonstrable exercise of exclusive authority with inviolable borders and a unidimensional identity, the latter echoing Fengquan's conceit.

This article explores the intersection of perception and reality and the influence of the two misperceptions detailed above on the efforts of Sichuan Province officials during the late Qing and early Republican eras to exert such authority in Kham by arresting material flows such as rupees from British India, and the spiritual-cultural identity entwined with Buddhism flowing from Lhasa. Regional and local, respectively, each flow presented different challenges to Chinese authority in Kham during the borderland region's tumultuous transition from empire to nation-state in the early twentieth century. The first section briefly introduces the contentious local and regional situation in the Kham borderlands at the turn of the nineteenth century, which was manifest in a bifurcated structure of competing authority between the Sichuan and Lhasa governments. The second section then analyzes the transformative influence wrought by the globalizing norm of territorial sovereignty. The final two sections turn to a case study of Sichuan officials' efforts to arrest the flow of Empress Victoria rupees, bolstered by spiritual misidentification, from British India into Kham.

In response to the rupee's ubiquity as currency across the plateau as far east as Dartsedo (Dajianlu, known today as Kangding), and the debilitating effects of the corresponding

devaluation of Qing *sycee* (*yinding*) in the early twentieth century, Sichuan officials minted a new silver coin, the *Zangyuan*, for exclusive use in Kham and Tibet. Its portrait depicted the Guangxu Emperor, modeled after the rupee's empress—mistakenly identified across the plateau as a “vagabond lama.” The coin remained in circulation in Kham until the late 1950s. Its minting was accompanied by a comprehensive endeavor for the region's transformation and incorporation, comprising a range of policies similarly informed by the misperceptions noted above, intended to arrest the flow of competing influences and to undermine the monasteries' power in Kham society. Echoing the New Policies (*xinzheng*) that were changing the society of *neidi* at the time (see Reynolds 1993), the endeavor included compulsory education, the tightening of Sichuan's control over regional commerce, the establishment of new industry, an expansion of mining, and the enactment of hygiene regulations.

Sichuan and later Republican officials' assertion of inviolable borders around the Kham borderland simultaneously made possible and necessitated the quashing of ambiguity, whether of identity or authority, in the commercial, spiritual, and temporal realms. These officials perceived that only subversion of the monasteries' influence as a conduit for Lhasa's competing spiritual and cultural authority could free the Khampas to become “Chinese.” The relative success and failure of these efforts to sever Kham from commercial and spiritual networks, from the greater region and from Lhasa, were determined at the intersection of Chinese perception and reality, by the degree of each flow's integration into Khampa society and the persuasive power of each Chinese alternative. The presumption that it was necessary—or even possible—to sever local cultural or spiritual influence on a borderland population, or to enforce a single cultural or national identity, in order to effect acceptance of a new political authority and inclusion in a new body politic, was a flawed axiom of state and nation builders in China and beyond.

### **Bordering Kham**

When Fengquan met his fate in 1905, Kham was a complex patchwork of relatively independent polities beyond the direct authority of Qing and Tibetan officials: a borderland on the cusp of political and economic change. Though situated entirely within the territory of the Qing Empire, Kham became a borderland caught between Tibetan and Sichuanese ambitions, beginning with its nominal division in 1727 by Qing demarcation not of a border, but of a point of interaction—a sandstone stele erected alongside a pass high in the Markhamgang (Ningjing)

Mountains, west of the Dri (Jinsha) River, an upper tributary of the Yangtze River (see figure 1). The stele designated the lands to its west the “land of burning incense,” ruled by the Dalai Lama; those to its south part of Yunnan Province; and those to its east, the largest part of Kham, under Sichuan jurisdiction (Chen G. 1986, 125; Kolmaš 1967, 41).<sup>3</sup> Sichuan’s new western “border,” marked along the crest of the Markhamgang range on both Qing and foreign maps printed after 1727, ended Lhasa’s tenuous claim to temporal authority over polities east of the stele, initiated only several decades earlier with the dispatch of Tibetan commissioners, census takers, and tax collectors as far east as Dartsedo (Shakabpa 1984, 113, 122).

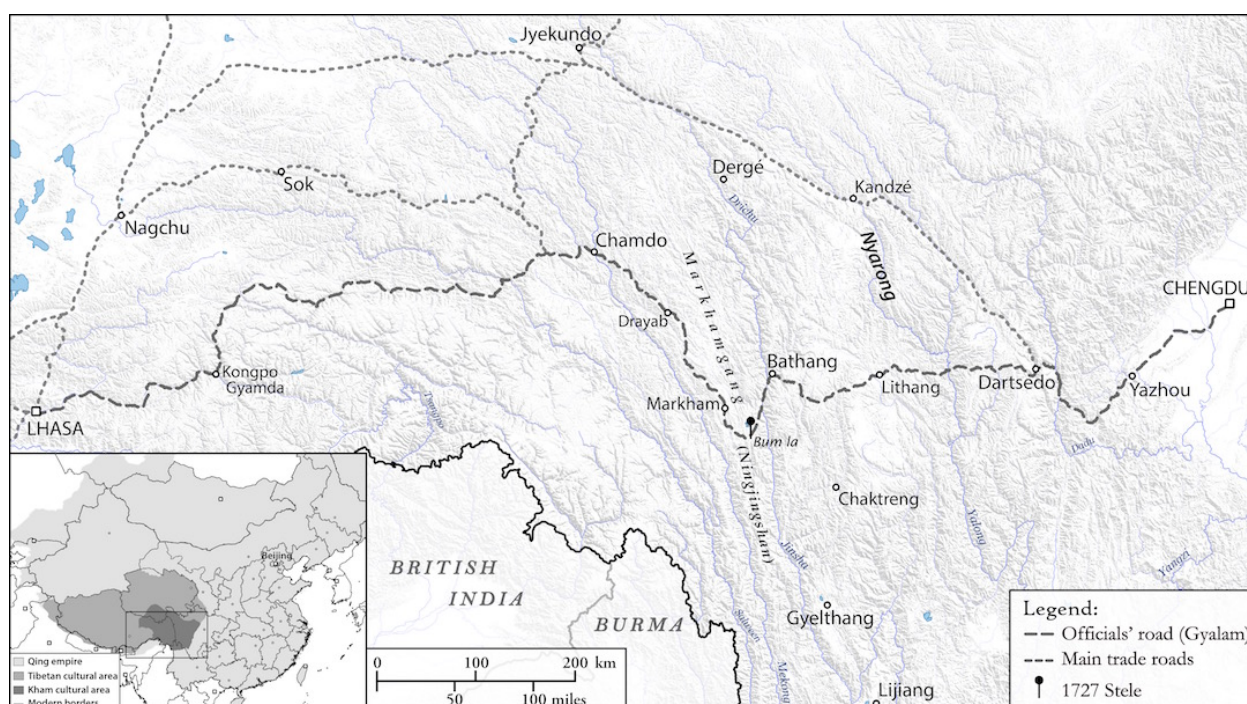


Figure 1. Map showing 1727 Stele and the main trade road through Kham. Inset: Location of Kham within the Qing Empire. *Source:* created by Scott Relyea and Rémi Chaix based on data from NASA’s Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM).

Rather than being incorporated into Sichuan’s territorial bureaucracy, however, these polities were administered indirectly by indigenous lay rulers invested with *tusi* titles and seals of imperial imprimatur in exchange for nominal tribute. Though also patronizing several of the largest monasteries in eastern Kham, the Qing focused on temporal rulers as conduits of its authority, while Lhasa exerted spiritual authority on Khampa society via the monasteries, by

appointing abbots and training monks. What evolved in eastern Kham before 1905 was tenuous accommodation of a bifurcated structure of competing authority: the Qing loosely exerting control in the temporal realm through its invested *tusi*, and Lhasa maintaining spiritual influence on society through Khampa monasteries, both Gelukpa and less so those of other schools, which played a dominant role in the region's economy and often also held sway over lay rulers.<sup>4</sup> Only two polities could be considered under direct, external administration—the Chakla domain, whose capital Dartsedo was designated a Qing subprefecture (*ting*) in 1729, and Nyarong (Zhandui, today's Xinlong), to which Lhasa dispatched a *chikhyap* (commissioner) beginning in 1866 (Tsomu 2014, 222–224; Rockhill 1891 [2000], 276). By the turn of the nineteenth century, the presence of the latter official and his penchant for subverting Qing authority over its *tusi* and threatening the flow of goods and couriers across Kham was perceived as fostering instability not only locally, but also regionally, by weakening Qing influence on the Dalai Lama. Some officials saw this as opening the door for Russian overtures.

As figure 1 shows, two important roads stretched westward from Dartsedo, tethering Tibet to Sichuan. Though both accommodated a range of travelers, the northern road—higher in altitude, and with fewer mountain passes—was the conduit of commerce, also known as the “tea road,” and the southern road—also known as the “officials’ road” (*gyalam*)—was the route of Qing couriers, officials, and soldiers. Foreigners could travel along either road, if often endangered by bandits, but they were not allowed to cross the “border” into Tibet, marked in the south by the 1727 stele and in the north roughly southeast of Jyekundo (Geguduo, today's Yushu), a town nominally under the Xining *amban*'s jurisdiction. Indeed, on a specially arranged visit to the stele in 1904, British diplomat Alexander Hosie (NA, *Report by Mr. A. Hosie*, 1904, FO 228/1549) encountered a row of Tibetan soldiers facing an equal row of Qing soldiers crowding the pass on each side of the border stone, the former determined to prevent even his glancing the stele's face in Tibetan territory as the latter were nervously uncertain just how the Tibetan soldiers would act. This may have been a special show for Hosie, though, as other foreign travelers encountered both resistance and indifference, suggesting that the border may have had more meaning on maps and to distant officials than it did to the region itself (e.g., Edgar 1908, 47). Keeping the two roads open and flowing with commerce and couriers was essential to Qing authority in both Kham and Tibet and thus was one of the main tasks of Qing soldiers. But, after 1905, their once-limited role changed.



## Shifting Authority

Since the last decade of the nineteenth century, Sichuan gentry and officials perceived increasing threats to Qing authority on the plateau not only from Lhasa, via the monasteries and the Nyarong *chikhyap*, but also from the British and Russian empires. The convergence of two events—the Younghusband Expedition reaching Lhasa from India in 1904 and the 1905 Khampa uprising in Batang—only exacerbated their fears, simultaneously rendering bifurcated authority locally untenable and the promised benefits of the globalizing norm of territorial sovereignty appealing. The expedition seemed to validate former Sichuan governor-general Lu Chuanlin's ([1900] 1968, 5) assertion that demonstrating sufficient control in Kham as the basis for appeal to the international law principle of nonintervention could protect Sichuan. The uprising, of which local monks were the primary instigators, seemed to justify the subsequent endeavor to expunge monastic influence from Kham society. The effort to arrest threatening flows was institutionalized with the 1907 promulgation of forty-three “Regulations for the Future of Batang” (*Batang shanhou zhangzheng*), Zhao's blueprint for transforming and incorporating Kham (SA, Qing 7–74).

During his four-year tenure as the first Sichuan-Yunnan frontier commissioner (*Chuan-Dian bianwu dachen*), Zhao oversaw implementation of *gaitu guiliu* (bureaucratization) in every Kham polity both east and west of the stele, as well as several polities outside the traditional Kham region west to Gyamda (Jiangda), 250 kilometers from Lhasa. Bureaucratization was a frontier policy through which a local indigenous ruler was stripped of his *tusi* title and replaced by a civil magistrate appointed by the central Qing government in Beijing. These polities were then incorporated into the Chinese territorial bureaucracy, typically as a district (*xian*), and sometimes with a new name.<sup>5</sup> Yet a report from May 1911 (“Huiyi zhengwu” 1911) suggests that few if any civil officials had been dispatched to Kham, the polities bureaucratized by Zhao administered instead by military officials temporarily occupying the newly established civil posts.

Even while numerous Kham polities were successfully, if partially, bureaucratized through 1910, the American missionary J. H. Edgar (IOS, “Chinese colonization of S.E. Tibet,” 1910, L/P+S/20/87–2) recognized the persistent power of the monasteries on Kham society, observing that Qing authority was “asserted rather than exercised”:

China has by wily devices and stern decrees vainly sought to make both her Capital and Emperor objects worthy of Tibetan interest and homage. But Lhasa remains the true mother of all Tibetan-speaking people, and her priests, when the crisis is acute, will recognize her mandates alone; and as agents of the Dalai Lama—the Spiritual Power—will steal the hearts of the people in spite of Chinese mandarins and Tibetan Princes.

As merchant houses, moneylenders, and landlords, Khampa monasteries were important regional economic centers, regulating the distribution of brick tea and extracting labor. The monasteries' temporal and economic power in Kham society derived from serving the spiritual needs of the people through Buddhism and recruiting young male initiates (van Spengen 2000, 135–138; Tucci 1980, 161). The real degree of the Dalai Lama's influence in areas of Kham both with and without Gelukpa monasteries notwithstanding, Edgar's observation highlights Sichuan's inability to exert an exclusive authority that was both made possible and required by an absolutist conception of the globalizing norm of territorial sovereignty.

Unlike their counterparts in the central Qing government, Sichuan officials in the early twentieth century indigenized the principles of international law, adapting them to confront tenuous Qing authority, observed by Edgar, and perceived threats of territorial intervention on the plateau from British India and Russia. In Kham, where theoretical claims to sovereignty intersected with the actual exercise of authority, these officials confronted both regional and local flows of competing political, social, and economic influence and engaged with transforming governance. Their adoption of an absolutist conception of territorial sovereignty thus resulted in the implementation of policies that equated the exercise of exclusive and legitimate authority with a unidimensional identity and inviolable borders. This conception was absolutist not because Sichuan officials believed that universal respect for the inviolability of borders (intrinsic to the ideal sovereignty conveyed in the Euro-American rhetoric of international law) was true in contemporary global practice. Rather, these officials perceived that global recognition of a principle of nonintervention, initially referenced by Lu Chuanlin, shielded their efforts to exert absolute and exclusive authority within a Kham encircled by clearly delineated borders (see Relyea forthcoming). An absolutist conception of sovereignty thus fostered Sichuan officials' misperception that they possessed the power both to exclude external influence, such as Indian rupees, and to undermine internal influence, such as the spiritual identity projected from Lhasa via Khampa monasteries. Their conception affirmed that

demonstration of such power in Kham would substantiate the assertion of sovereignty in the global community, thereby legitimating appeals to nonintervention.

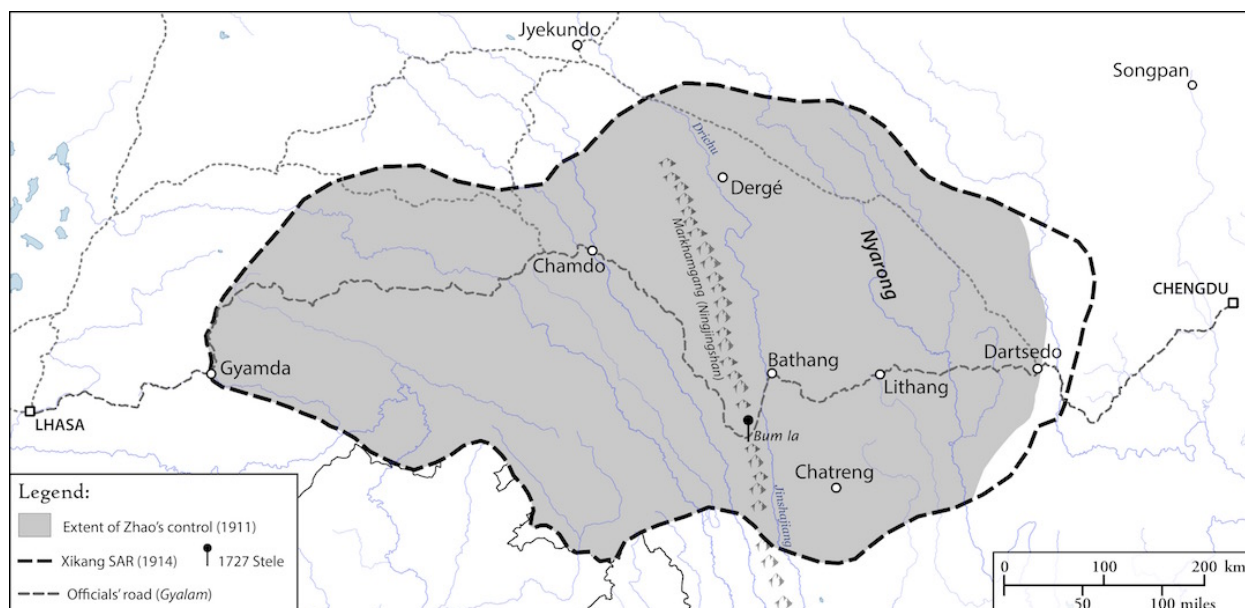


Figure 2. Borders of Xikang Special Administrative Region (1914–1939). *Source:* created by Scott Relyea and Rémi Chaix.

In spite of the unfinished state of bureaucratization, Zhao's successor, Fu Songmu, submitted a memorial in late 1911 proposing the establishment of Xikang Province (*Xikang sheng*) across the entire region purportedly “pacified” by Zhao's frontier army. Earlier that year, Zhao had written, “With danger on all sides, certainly we must establish a province [in Kham], otherwise the territory cannot be controlled and Tibet cannot be saved” (*QCBDS*, no. 0808 1911 [XT3.3], 920–921). Embodying the second misperception, that regional flows could be arrested by proclamation of inviolable borders encircling a borderland territory, establishing a province evinces the influence of Sichuan officials' adoption of an absolutist conception of territorial sovereignty. Thwarted by the Xinhai Revolution (1911) and subsequent Qing abdication, Fu's memorial was published as a book (Fu [1912] 1988), then serialized in the Beijing periodical *Eastern Miscellany* (*Xikang jiansheng tan*) in late 1913, on the eve of the Simla Conference, convened between the British, Tibetan, and ROC governments to determine the territorial extent of Chinese sovereignty on the Tibetan plateau (see McGranahan 2003). As the conference collapsed, the ROC central government established the Sichuan Frontier Special Administrative

Region (*Chuanbian tebie xingzhengqu*, or SAR)<sup>6</sup> in June 1914 within the same borders delineated in Fu's proposal (see figure 2) (SA, *Min* 195, *juan* 9, 1914). Chinese authority, though, remained but a figment of a distant bureaucracy's imagination. In 1939 the territory was reconstituted yet again on the establishment of Xikang Province, which disappeared from Chinese atlases in 1955.

Formalized by Fu's memorial and the SAR, the geographic extent of Zhao's bureaucratization fostered conceptions among early twentieth-century Sichuan officials of both an external border, protecting Kham—and Tibet—from British Indian intervention, and an internal border, severing it from the influence of Buddhist-entwined cultural identity flowing from Lhasa. A product of their absolutist conception of territorial sovereignty, these two conceptual borders in turn informed actions fostered by the first misperception, that Khampa opposition to Qing and ROC policies derived solely from the presumed deleterious influence of monasteries on society. The self-reinforcing exercise of globally accepted principles of sovereignty sustained Qing and especially ROC claims to sovereignty in Kham—and Tibet—premised on the absence of competing authority originating both locally and regionally, and the imposition of a "Chinese" identity on the Khampas.

The apparent success of assimilative projects in borderlands across the globe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, several of which Zhao ([1907] 1984, 48) referenced explicitly—among them Meiji Japan in Ezo (Hokkaido) and England in Australia—may have heightened such expectations for the endeavor in Kham. Yet Sichuan officials seemed to underestimate the powerful influence of Buddhism on Khampa identity, which they erroneously presumed could be easily transformed if only the spiritual influence flowing from Lhasa were inhibited. The anticipated exertion of exclusive authority and corresponding formation of a unidimensional "Chinese" identity in Kham, both promised externally and presumably facilitated internally by an absolutist conception of territorial sovereignty, thus converged with Sichuan officials' two misperceptions to foster policies that were largely unable to enhance the only superficial Qing control observed by both Edgar and Fengquan.

In addition to bureaucratization, these policies comprised the institution of compulsory education to subvert the monasteries' social influence on Kham society; the formation of a monopoly tea company, expansion of Chinese commerce, and minting of a new currency to erode the monasteries' economic and temporal power; and the establishment of local industry

and expansion of mining to shift control of local resources away from the monasteries. The “Regulations for the Future of Batang” also encouraged new hygiene practices and mandated reverence for ancestors, expressly prohibiting the traditional practice of sky burial as barbarism. But the policy that may have most successfully answered Edgar’s call to “exercise” rather than simply assert authority in Kham was the minting of *Zangyuan* coins. Initiated before Zhao promulgated his forty-three regulations, but dependent on them for its long-term success, the coin perhaps most effectively undermined the monasteries’ local power—in the economic realm.

### Empresses and “Vagabond Lamas”

By most accounts, the first silver rupees crossed the Himalayas as early as 1835, bearing either the mark of the East India Company or a portrait of the British monarch. Two decades later, the first extensive wave of British Indian currency infiltrated markets across the plateau in the aftermath of the two-year Nepalese-Tibetan War, the result of a provision in the 1856 Treaty of Thapathali that obligated the defeated Tibetan government to remit an annual indemnity of 10,000 Indian rupees (Chen Y. 1983, 75). The coins riding this wave were emblazoned with a new monarch, whose silver face proved more capable than either Lhasa-minted *tangka* coins or Qing *sycee* of challenging the monastery-centered barter economy that persisted across much of Kham through the late nineteenth century. Writing in 1882, the English adventurer Edward Colborne Baber ([1882] 1971, 198) explained, “Georgian and Victorian rupees are distinguished as *p’o-tu* and *mo-tu*, meaning male-head and female-head. Those which bear a crowned presentment of Her Majesty are named *Lama tob-du*, or vagabond Lama, the crown having been mistaken for the head-gear of a religious mendicant.” The English explorer T. T. Cooper (1871, 456) found that some Khampas even believed the image represented the Dalai Lama. These perceived resemblances may have abetted Empress Victoria’s subsequent eastward journey to Dartsedo, where the coin would pass current by the 1880s with a base value of three *qian* (mace), two *fen* (candareen), the equivalent of approximately one-third of a silver *tael* (*liang*).<sup>7</sup>

Before the Indian rupee’s arrival, bricks of border tea (*biancha*) produced in the factories of Yazhou (today’s Ya’an) were the primary currency across Kham (see Bertsch 2009), alongside the barter of goods such as *tsampa* (roasted barley flour), butter, and horses. In the 1870s, foreign travelers venturing west from Dartsedo were advised to travel with horse loads of brick tea in lieu of Qing *sycee*. In the 1880s, the French missionary Auguste Desgodins (Rockhill

[1891] 2000, 279–280) observed that wages for workmen and servants were paid in bricks of tea, and in Kandzé (Ganzi) in the early 1890s, the American adventurer William Rockhill (1894, 326; [1891] 2000, 221) reported fines imposed on Tibetans for murder calculated in tea: 120 bricks for someone of high social standing, 40 for a woman, and a mere 2 or 3 if a pauper or wandering foreigner were slaughtered.

Control of the trade and transshipment of border tea in and across Kham was a crucial component of the monasteries' authority, entwined in the commercial and spiritual realms, over Khampa commoners and native rulers, who also held Qing *tusi* titles. Similarly influenced by perceptions of Tibetans' dependence on tea in their everyday lives, this control perhaps paralleled in form the policy of “using tea to control the Tibetans” (*yicha yufan*) through tight regulation of the volume of border tea shipped annually to Kham and Tibet initiated by the Ming government and subsequently adopted by the Qing. On a journey in 1870, Cooper (1871, 410) witnessed this control and its reliance on tea, writing, “Grain, yaks, sheep, horses, and even children, are given to the rapacious priesthood in payment for tea.” Three decades later, an officer in Zhao's army noted, “Tibetans are addicted to tea as if it were life itself. Each time they drink it, they empty no fewer than ten cupfuls” (Chen Q. [1940–1942] 1999, 9).

The Victorian rupee's potential to supplant brick tea as the currency of exchange threatened to weaken the commercial component of the monasteries' power in Kham. Indeed, Baber ([1882] 1971, 198) observed this potentially destabilizing result in Batang, describing the exchange of “a great treasure of [tea] bricks” amassed by the monks of Ba Chöde Monastery at a loss of some 38 percent of its initial value. Counted, rather than valued by weight, the coin also complicated the Kham market for Chinese merchants. When the empress burst into the *guozhuang* (trading houses, see Yudru this issue) of Dartsedo in the early 1880s, the English explorer Captain William Gill (1880, 170) observed that Tibetan merchants, weary of being cheated by their Chinese counterparts, “have abandoned the cumbersome method of making payments by weight, which lends itself so easily to every kind of trickery, and have adopted the rupee.”

By the early 1890s, Indian rupees had largely superseded the tea brick as currency. Rockhill ([1891] 2000, 271), on a journey along the northern road, found only Indian rupees current in each polity, including the large market towns of Degé and Jyekundo. In the latter, his Qing *sycee* was “reluctantly changed for coin by the Chinese as a personal favor, for they said

they could do nothing with it.” A second, more significant wave of Indian rupees flooded the plateau after the signing of the Trade Regulations of 1893, which established a trade mart for British Indian exports at Dromo (Yadong). In 1897, in another sign of its growing influence, the rupee replaced the *tael* as the trade mart’s currency of record for import and export duties (Tao [1907] 1985, 370; Chen Y. 1983, 75–76).

One Chinese researcher (Zhong 1993, 19) estimates that more than 40 million rupees crossed the Himalayas from their first appearance in Tibet until 1911. The effect on military provisions dispatched annually from the Sichuan provincial treasury was devastating. By the early years of the twentieth century, the value of the 103,000 *tael* disbursements had fallen by roughly one-third, such that for every 10,000 *taels* in remuneration received, garrisons in Kham, especially along the southern road, could purchase goods valued at the equivalent of only 6,800 *taels* (Zhang Y. [1907] 1994, 1361). Thus, for the merchants and officials of Sichuan, the presence of Indian rupees on the plateau had become unacceptable, not only weakening the morale—and discipline—of Qing soldiers, but also further destabilizing their already-tenuous authority east of the stele.



Figure 3. Obverse (left) and reverse of 1902 *Luguan*. Source: Zhang C. (2011, 23).

As with many actions implemented in Kham during the first several decades of the twentieth century, the first effort to undermine the dominance of Victorian rupees originated locally. In 1902, Liu Tingshu, the Dartsedo subprefect, commandeered that year’s shipment of silver *sycee* bound for Tibet to mint 230,340 coins composed of 98 percent silver. The characters

“*Luguan zuyin*” on the coins’ obverse signified their production in Dartsedo (the “Lu” from Dajianlu, see figure 3). Stamped on the reverse were characters denoting the coin’s designated value as three *qian*, two *fen*, equal to the base value of its competitor, the Indian rupee (Chen Y. 1983, 79; Zhang C. 2011, 7, 16). Although there is no record of the *Luguan*’s reception in Dartsedo or Kham, or of whether it held its designated value, the coin continued to circulate in the region’s markets at least into the early years of the ROC. More important, Liu’s action provided the impetus for a new coin minted initially in Chengdu, much as the Victorian rupee provided the design.

The last time the Qing sought to replace a foreign-minted coin circulating on the plateau came the year after victory in the Sino-Nepalese War (1788–1792), when the first silver *baozang* were minted with the Qianlong Emperor’s name appearing vertically on the obverse (with the characters *baozang* appearing horizontally) and his name transliterated in Tibetan script on the reverse, signifying Qing control in Tibet. The design of the *baozang* was virtually identical to copper *tongbao* coins minted in the Qing and previous dynasties—on the obverse of which the emperor’s name appeared vertically and the characters *tongbao* appeared horizontally—except that the distinctive square hole at its center was replaced on the *baozang* with only the relief of a square on both sides. Though initially successful in limiting Nepalese influence in the Tibetan economy, and in spite of the subsequent minting of Jiaqing, Daoguang, and Xianfeng *baozang*, as Qing imperial influence waned throughout the nineteenth century, the coin fell out of favor (Rhodes 1990), replaced by a pretty face.

### **Emperors and *Zangyuan***

Imitation of the “vagabond lama”—the appearance of Empress Victoria—distinguished the Qing’s second effort to limit a foreign currency’s influence on plateau commerce. Commonly known as the *Zangyang* or Sichuan rupee (*Sichuan lubi*), the *Zangyuan* was the first and only imperial coin in general circulation to depict the face of a Chinese emperor (Bailey 1945, 68; Chen Y. 1983, 79). Yet in its initial minting, the facial features of the young Guangxu Emperor on the coin’s obverse seemed to trace those of Her Majesty (see figure 4). The flowery detail on the reverse also closely replicated that of the Victorian rupee (see figure 5). Over time, his nose, eyes, and even lips would change, but his identical vestments and headpiece—a cap that, like the empress’s crown, similarly evoked a “vagabond lama”—remained the same. Trial minting



commenced in small numbers at the end of 1902, but the *Zangyuan*'s impact was slight and mint runs small until Zhao changed the complexion of authority on the plateau, prompting some to refer to the coin as “Zhao Erfeng money” (*Zhao Erfeng qian*).



Figure 4. (left) “Vagabond lama,” obverse of 1885 Empress Victoria silver rupee; (right) obverse of silver *Zangyuan*, ca. 1905. *Source*: Zhang C. (2011, 15).



Figure 5. (left) Reverse of 1885 Empress Victoria silver rupee; (right) reverse of silver *Zangyuan*, ca. 1905. *Source*: Zhang C. (2011, 15).

A year before Zhao’s appointment as frontier commissioner, Sichuan governor-general Xiliang (*QCBDS*, no. 0058, 71) equated the task of eradicating Indian rupees with the Qianlong Emperor’s assertion of authority over Tibet through minting *baozang* a century earlier. “Currency is related to our state’s power to govern (*zhuquan*, sovereignty),” Xiliang proclaimed

in 1906, “and Tibet is our vassal.” Asserting that Han and Khampa alike happily welcomed the *Zangyuan*’s initial circulation in Luding and environs, he went on to express his belief that the coin “would protect our economic power and authority.” Emblazoned with a Victorianized Guangxu, the coin evinced the influence of the first misperception, carrying the weight of expectations that its introduction could repel the rupee invasion and assert absolute and exclusive economic authority. Perhaps reflecting the importance of this goal, in the half decade through 1911, more than 60 percent of all coins minted in the Qing realm were *Zangyuan*, worth nearly 7.3 million *yuan* (Chen Y. 1983, 80).<sup>8</sup>

Despite the emperor’s resemblance to the empress, a pretty face alone was insufficient to propel the *Zangyuan* to dominance, as the Khampas were comfortable with their “vagabond lamas” and the Han merchants were unwilling to endure sizable losses on exchange. Composed of 93.5 percent silver, the *Zangyuan*’s initial value was set at three *qian*, five *fen*, slightly less than the rupee’s exchange rate of three *qian*, seven or eight *fen*. After its first large-scale minting, however, the *Zangyuan* fell to only two *qian*, four or five *fen*, with merchants rarely receiving more than the equivalent of three *qian* in goods per coin (*QCBDS*, no. 0264, 284; Wu 1979, no. 14, 8). Acknowledging that Guangxu could not compete unless the Han merchants of Kham were provided additional incentive, in 1909 Zhao accommodated merchants’ repeated requests, reducing the government exchange rate for *Zangyuan* to three *qian*, two *fen* (*QCBDS*, no. 0264, 284). Even before this devaluation, however, the commoners of Kham faced mandates to remit tax payments in the weaker currency. In the “Regulations for the Future of Batang,” Zhao banned payment in kind for land taxes and directed local officials to accept only *Zangyuan* or Qing *sycee* as payment, implicitly forbidding the use of Indian rupees (SA, Qing 7–73 and 7–74). Two years later, *sycee* were no longer accepted, and new regulations governing Khampa nomads similarly mandated payment of livestock taxes exclusively in *Zangyuan* (*QCBDS*, no. 0390, 436–437). Reflecting and strengthening this new currency environment, beginning in 1907 most financial reports used *Zangyuan* as the sole currency of record, and all salaries and military provisions dispatched from Chengdu were paid in *Zangyuan*, as were debts and payments to Khampa merchants and commoners.

Suggesting the success of these policies, by spring 1911 Han merchants in Kham reportedly transacted all business in *Zangyuan* and a new copper *tongyuan* coin, 10 million of which had been minted two years earlier (Chen Q. 1938). In addition, English lieutenant colonel

F. M. Bailey found that the *Zangyuan* held a higher value than the Indian rupee (Bailey 1945, 68). This tenuous market stability and Zhao's endeavor enticed enough new Han merchants to ascend the plateau that a branch of the Dartsedo Chamber of Commerce opened in the Guandi Temple in Batang ("Batang chuangshe" 1910) on the southern road. And on the northern road, new Han businesses opened in Degé, which their brethren had rarely visited before 1909. One Shaanxi merchant established a teahouse with an accompanying distillery, and another opened a restaurant serving "fine foods" alongside a department store, *Cuihua Baihuo Gongsu*, which sold both Chinese and foreign goods ("Dege shangye" 1910).

Yet the *Zangyuan* successfully supplanted the Indian rupee only in polities reached by Zhao's frontier army, the coin's influence decreasing where his soldiers were few and his authority thus weak, particularly west of the stele and in Tibet proper, where Indian rupees remained ubiquitous.<sup>9</sup> Even east of the stele, the *Zangyuan*—and its *tongyuan* partner—were not the only currencies exchanged in the marketplace, joined by Qing *sycee*, *bankai* from Yunnan, Tibetan *tangka*, Indian rupees, French francs, Russian rubles, and several paper notes from both *neidi* and Tibet (*Ganzi xianzhi* 1990, 195). Despite this mélange of currencies, however, the growing dominance of the *Zangyuan* in the Xikang region suggests a measure of success arresting the flow of some economic forces along borders newly delineated by Fu.

Perhaps the most important factor in the *Zangyuan*'s success vis-à-vis the Victorian rupee was that both coins were relatively new to Kham, the "vagabond lama" rupee claiming no special cultural virtue that could not be mimicked by Victorianizing the Guangxu Emperor. Thus, the *Zangyuan*, once forcibly infused into the economy by Zhao's mandates, encountered little resistance to becoming current, particularly as Indian rupees had already initiated a decline in Kham's monastery-centered tea brick economy. Late Qing minting of *Zangyuan* planted the seed of currency exclusivity and absolute economic authority that expanded during the Republican era, when the coin—still adorned with the Guangxu Emperor—became an important regional currency. This coincided with the next governmental delineation of borders, the establishment of Xikang Province.

*Zangyuan* were minted in Chengdu from 1902 to 1917. By 1916, more than 3 million coins were in circulation, but their value had fallen, fluctuating between two *qian*, eight *fen* and two *qian*, two *fen* (Zhang C. 2011, 23–25), and their geographic influence remained limited. Traversing Kham in 1914 following six years in Lhasa, the Han merchant Wei Sufen ([1915]

2013, 66) found that Indian rupees, valued at approximately four *qian*, outnumbered *Zangyuan* everywhere west of Chamdo, the furthest extent of stable authority maintained by Sichuan's frontier army. Interestingly, he also reported that merchants selling border tea from Sichuan all conducted business in *Zangyuan*, while those selling Indian tea used rupees. When *Zangyuan* minting was revived in Dartsedo, from 1930 to 1942, the coin was used for most transactions in Xikang, including commerce; moneylending by monasteries, village headmen, and local rulers; and land rent paid to monasteries by both short-term Khampa tenants and foreigners (Yang 2006, 103). In 1952, the newly established central People's Bank of China attempted to replace the currency by introducing a "three no's" policy, neither accepting or converting *Zangyuan*, nor prohibiting its use. Nevertheless, some two million remained in circulation through 1958 (Zhang C. 2011, 25).

This persistence is perhaps testament to the *Zangyuan*'s success in arresting the material flow of Indian rupees in the early twentieth century, strengthening Sichuan's commercial authority in the region. Yet in 1947 the French traveler André Migot (1955, 142) discovered that the *Zangyuan* had not eliminated all competitors in Kham: "Tea is much the most useful form of currency for a traveler in Tibet. Silver coins, though easier to transport, are less convenient, for there are several different kinds, each of which only has its full value in one particular part of the country.... Tea, on the other hand, is readily accepted everywhere." That tea bricks were still used as currency in the late 1940s evinces their continued importance to the region's commerce. Thus, in addition to stabilizing and controlling currency within the newly delineated borders of what would become Xikang, exerting authority over all aspects of the border tea trade was crucial not only for asserting commercial authority in Kham in the late Qing and early Republican eras and merging its economy with that of Sichuan and the burgeoning Chinese state, but also for challenging the monasteries' local authority.

Termination of the prohibition of Indian tea sales in Tibet in the 1904 Treaty of Lhasa, a product of the Younghusband Expedition, provoked concern among Sichuan merchants and officials of another regional flow mirroring the Indian rupee's challenge to Qing commercial authority in Kham. In early 1909 (SA, Qing 7-469), Zhao proclaimed, "In this time of acute commercial warfare, to maintain their financial strength, the government must encourage and invite all merchants in this area to cooperate, otherwise there is no way to counter [Indian tea] or to emerge victorious." To counter this flow, on May 20, 1910, Zhao officially established the

Merchants Tibetan Tea Joint Stock Company Limited (*Shangban Zangcha gufen youxian gongsi*),<sup>10</sup> a merchant-government partnership that monopolized the border tea trade by conglomerating all tea merchants from the five tea-producing districts around Yazhou (see Booz, this issue). Though the perception that tea leaves from Darjeeling and Assam were flooding the plateau proved to be a phantom (Booz 2011), the company, by undermining the economic component of the monasteries' authority, in a manner similar to the minting of *Zangyuan*, further supported efforts to arrest the flow into Kham of Buddhist-entwined cultural identity.

## Conclusion

Unlike such material flows as Indian rupees or spiritual and cultural influence, long-standing regional affinities and identities could not easily be prevented from crossing a physical border slicing through a region that shared a connected past. Under the misperception that Khampa opposition derived solely from external forces, Sichuan officials in the late Qing and early Republican eras believed that the Khampas, once freed from these flows and enlightened regarding the monasteries' deleterious influence, could be led to "civilization." As part of his comprehensive endeavor, Zhao instituted compulsory schooling to arrest these flows and to facilitate Sichuan's exertion of absolute and exclusive authority on Khampa society by acculturating its youth, thoroughly transforming the descendants of the two *dépa* insulted by Fengquan.

Zhao's goals for education are exemplified by the following two passages from textbooks specially commissioned for use in the Kham borderlands. Their content mirrored the curriculum introduced in new national schools established as part of the New Policies' effort to construct a unified "Chinese" identity across *neidi*. The first, from *Popular Songs of the Frontier (Guansu ge)*, was sung aloud: "Nyingmapa and Gelukpa are as disorderly as hemp. It is clear that weakening their [own] race is their primary goal. Not loving their country? Not caring for their mothers and fathers? What are they droning on about? What is the purpose of wearing the *putan* (woolen cloth)? From now on, I know not to pay attention to lamas, and certainly not to learn from them" (Zhang J. 1939, 76). The second is from *Three Character Rhymes of the Western Lands (Xiyu sanzhi yunyu)*: "You are very far away and lack knowledge. By going to school, you will understand the great meaning, whose essence is epitomized by two phrases, loyalty to country and respect for Confucius" (*QCBDS*, no. 0848, 963–964). While the song dissuaded

Khampa youth from pursuing monastic study by highlighting the monks' destructive influence on society, thereby undermining Lhasa's spiritual challenge to Qing authority, the rhyme awakened them to the nationalism at the core of their obligations to China, the sole legitimate source of authority—and identity—in Kham.

Zhao and his successors disregarded the validity of Khampa civilizational mores by presuming they could be swept away by chanting songs in Chinese. Their policies were informed by absolutist conceptions of territorial sovereignty and the perception that legitimate authority within a Kham/Xikang, severed from central Tibet by newly delineated borders, necessitated the inhabitants' unambiguous identification as subjects of the Qing Emperor, then citizens of the Chinese nation-state. Sichuan officials believed this possible only by arresting the competing flow of spiritual and cultural authority from Lhasa via Khampa monasteries, which both supported and justified arresting the regional flow of rupees and tea from India. These beliefs, however, were grounded in misperceptions not only of Khampa society, but also of the power of sovereignty itself—that exerting exclusive and absolute authority within the borderlands necessitated quashing internal ambiguity, and that only isolating Kham from all but Chinese influence could simultaneously shield and effectuate the assertion and exertion of their rule. For Fengquan, the two *dépa* were an embodiment of that ambiguity. They were the reflection of a superficial Chinese cultural and temporal authority continuously subverted by a deeper spiritual power whose persistence was untenable under an absolutist conception of territorial sovereignty fostered in the early twentieth century by shifting norms of legitimate authority, both regionally and globally.

Imitating the empress on the *Zangyuan* to render the Qing Emperor worthy of Tibetan homage, in Edgar's terms, was the equivalent of appropriating an icon of Lhasa's cultural influence—whether vagabond lama or the Dalai Lama—demonstrating both the dynamism of cultural interaction in the borderland and the power of the spiritual flow from Lhasa. Indeed, the intensity of the role played by Victorian rupees and Tibetan Buddhism in forging Khampa identity defined the potential influence of Qing and Republican Chinese alternatives, just as the role of perception in their constitution and the actual power to enforce their adoption determined the transformative success of these alternatives. Thus, the *Zangyuan* successfully arrested the flow of Indian rupees into much of Kham and, unlike either the tea company or compulsory schooling in the near term, undermined one component of the monasteries' local power to

project Lhasa's influence on the Khampas. Yet it remains uncertain if the endeavor to arrest such flows into a contested borderland and to strive for absolute and exclusive authority were necessary to substantiate Qing and later Republican Chinese claims to sovereignty in Kham and ultimately across Tibet—or if this were even possible.

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### Notes

- 1 Peacock feathers were a symbol of high status and official rank during the Qing dynasty.
- 2 *Neidi* refers to the “inner lands,” sometimes called “China proper.” This term appears frequently in Sichuan documents of both the Qing and early Republican eras to contrast Kham with the rest of Sichuan east of Dartsedo.
- 3 Though southernmost Kham was part of Yunnan, and much of northwestern Kham was under the jurisdiction of the Xining Amban, since the actions of Sichuan officials form the basis of this paper, Kham, unless otherwise noted, refers to that part of the ethnographic region extending east and west of the 1727 stele.
- 4 Not every polity in Kham hosted a Gelukpa monastery or one with any stature, thus the Dalai Lama's spiritual influence in some polities might have been only slight. See Relyea (2015) on the early twentieth-century struggle for authority in Kham between the Dalai Lama in the spiritual realm and the Qing in the temporal.
- 5 For example, Batang was designated Ba'an Prefecture (*Ba'an fu*) in 1908.
- 6 The name was later changed to the Xikang Special Administrative Region (*Xikang tebie xingzhengqu*).
- 7 Both the *qian* and the *fen* are measures of weight, the former equal to one-tenth of a tael, or approximately 3.7 grams, the latter one-tenth of a *qian*.
- 8 The *Zangyuan* circulated in one *yuan*, half *yuan*, and quarter *yuan* denominations.
- 9 The Sichuan *Zangyuan* also circulated in the northwestern Kham town of Kyegundo, in today's Qinghai Province, and both Chamdo and Markham (Mangkang), just west of the Markhamgang Mountains. A distinctive *Zangyuan* adorned with a smiling Guangxu Emperor might have been minted in Xining and circulated in Amdo in 1930 (Zhang 2011, 29–30).
- 10 Soon after its founding, the company's name was changed to the Merchants Frontier Tea Joint Stock Company (*Shangban biancha gufen youxian gongsi*).

## Abbreviations

- IOS: India Office Select Materials, British Library, London  
 NA: The National Archives, London  
 QCBDS: *Qingmo Chuandian biawu dang'an shiliao* [Studies of the reports of Sichuan and Yunnan affairs at the end of the Qing Empire]. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989.  
 SA: Sichuan Provincial Archives, Chengdu, China  
 SG: *Sichuan guanbao* [Sichuan officials' gazette]

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