



Military Culture in Tibet during the Ganden Phodrang Period (1642-1959): The Interaction between Tibetan and Other Traditions

Conference date and venue: 18-19 June 2018 at Wolfson College, Oxford
Convenors: Dr SG FitzHerbert (CNRS, CRCAO) and Dr Alice Travers (CNRS, CRCAO)

1. Preamble

Tibetan military institutions during the Ganden Phodrang period (1642-1959) were heir to a strong Tibetan martial tradition which had its roots in the period of the Tibetan Empire (7th to 9th c.), when Tibet was a major military contender on the Inner Asian stage.

However, in the centuries following the demise of the Tibetan Empire, Tibet's military culture was subject to many formative foreign influences. For example, after a century of imperial Mongol military domination from the mid-13th to the mid-14th century, Mongol troops of various factions continued to have a major influence on Tibetan affairs right up to the moment when the Fifth Dalai Lama was enthroned as head of state in 1642. In the wake of this pivotal moment, Mongol troops continued to be a major presence in Tibetan territory until the early 18th century, with a certain though little-known impact on Tibetan military culture.

Later, in the 18th century, the growing incorporation of the Ganden Phodrang territory within the Manchu imperial sphere—at a time when the Qing Dynasty was itself recasting itself in an increasingly martial mould (Waley-Cohen 2006)—likely had a significant impact on Tibetan military culture. A Sino-Manchu garrison was installed in Lhasa in 1721, placed on a permanent footing after 1728 and then moved to the suburbs. From 1751 to the 20th century, this garrison consisted, at least on paper, of 1500 men. It was made up, in varying proportions, of Manchu bannermen and Chinese (mostly Sichuanese) soldiers from the Green Standard troops, who served in three-year stints (Petech 1950, Elliot 2001, Dai 2009). The presence of this garrison certainly resulted in a degree of influence on the Tibetan troops until the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911. This is reflected by the fact that Tibetan troops of the Ganden Phodrang were often referred to in Tibetan sources until the beginning of the 20th century as *rya shyong*, lit “trained by Chinese”. As yet, very little else is known about how Sino-Manchu troops interacted in Lhasa and elsewhere with the Tibetan army from the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century.

Little is also known about the foreign bodyguards serving other diplomatic representatives in Tibet during this period.

Finally, in the early 20th century other foreign military models found their way to Tibet, most significantly British, Russian and Japanese. Successive attempts to modernise the Tibetan army with the involvement of these foreign actors in the early 20th century has already been the subject of a certain amount of scholarly attention (Goldstein, Travers, Hyer and Komoto et al.).

2. Call for Papers

This conference, organised in the framework of the TibArmy project (<https://tibarmy.hypotheses.org>), aims to fill some of these lacunae by examining the presence of





various foreign military cultures in Tibet during this period and looking for the possible influences that these contacts had on Tibetan military culture and institutions.

In addition to proposals based on Tibetan sources, we are looking for contributions using Mongol, Manchu, Chinese, Nepalese, Indian, British, Japanese and other sources that can shed light on the complexity of military culture in Tibet during this period.

We invite papers containing original research based on primary sources, and relating to at least one of the four following themes:

- 1) The presence of foreign troops in areas under the jurisdiction of the Ganden Phodrang government; the way they may have interacted with Tibetan military institutions; and the political repercussions this may have had. This would include instances of foreign troops fighting alongside Tibetan troops; foreign troops stationed as temporary or permanent occupying garrisons; and the military bodyguards of foreign representatives stationed in Tibet.
- 2) The perceived contrasts and differences between Tibetan military culture and that of others, as reflected in primary sources;
- 3) The possible influence of foreign military cultures on the Ganden Phodrang army in areas of (for example) training, tactics, equipment, organisation, rituals and so on.
- 4) The possible tensions that foreign military models may have created within Tibetan military institutions.

If you would like to participate, please submit an abstract of around 300 words to erc tibarmy@gmail.com by the 1st of March 2018 for review by the organising committee.

Please note that other specific topics relating to the Tibetan army during the Ganden Phodrang period (such as weaponry and wars fought) will be addressed in forthcoming workshops, panels, and conferences (see our website <https://tibarmy.hypotheses.org/tibarmy-international-conferences>).