

## Chapter 8

# The Political Status of Tibet and the Simla Conference (1913–14): Translated Concepts in Modern Tibet

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### Introduction

The Simla Conference of 1913–14, which was held in India between representatives of Tibet, China, and Britain, was a fateful event in modern Tibetan history. During this conference, the three parties discussed the relationship between Tibet and China after the demise of the Qing Dynasty with specific attention given to the political status of Tibet as described in modern political concepts such as “sovereignty”, “suzerainty”, “autonomy”, and “independence”. The Tibetan plenipotentiary asserted the “independence” of Tibet in the first phase of the conference; afterwards, however, he accepted a British proposal for reconciliation by signing a treaty guaranteeing not the “independence”, but the “autonomy” of Tibet under Chinese “suzerainty”. The Chinese plenipotentiary, in spite of this fact, refused to sign the treaty due to concerns regarding the demarcation of the boundaries between Tibet and China. Why had the Tibetan plenipotentiary, Shatra Penjor Dorjé (*Bshad sgra dpal 'byor rdo rje*), signed this treaty which gave up Tibet’s “independence”? Did Tibet make this concession to conclude the agreement under pressure from Britain?<sup>1</sup>

Tibet certainly expected Britain to be its biggest supporter, and this expectation was a major factor for Tibet in its decision-making process during the conference. The Tibetan plenipotentiary, however, did not always follow the terms of reconciliation recommended by the British. While accepting British terms regarding Tibet’s political status, the Tibetan plenipotentiary only reluctantly compromised on demarcating the boundary between Tibet and China in the final stage of negotiations. This boundary issue

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Richardson points out that, “the Tibetans, who had regained their complete independence, were strongly opposed to accepting Chinese overlordship under any name. Their eventual assent to the concept of suzerainty was due to pressure from the British Government, which for many reasons—disinclination to assume additional responsibilities being possibly the strongest—was not prepared to support Tibet’s claim to absolute independence.” See [Richardson 1962: 109].

became the conference's major issue of dispute, and eventually led to the conference negotiations being broken off. Therefore, in addition to consideration of British influence, we also have to examine the decision-making process of Tibetan foreign policies at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Even though many scholars have examined the Simla Conference, the decision-making process of the Tibetan government has remained unclear. Since the conference was conducted primarily in English, many researchers have analyzed the English language records of the negotiations that took place during the conference [Lamb 1966; Mehra 1973; Singh 1988]. Some of these valuable primary English language records concerning the Simla Conference include the India Office Records (IOR), held in the British Library in London, and the Foreign Office Records (FO), held in the National Archives in London. In addition to these is a 1940 collection of Beijing published archival sources of the conference, *The Boundary Question between China and Tibet: A Valuable Record of the Tripartite Conference between China, Britain and Tibet, Held in India, 1913–1914*. What has not been fully clarified, however, is how Tibet understood and interpreted English political concepts, the conceptual gaps between the Tibetan and English languages, and how these gaps affected negotiations. To clarify these important issues, we have to focus on Tibetan materials in our investigation of how and why the Tibetan plenipotentiary accepted the British mediation with regards to political status of Tibet.

Primary sources in the Tibetan language from this period which researchers can access are quite limited. A key document that is available is the Tibetan record of the Simla Conference compiled by the Tibetan plenipotentiary after the conference entitled, *Shing stag rgya gar 'phags pa'i yul du dbyin bod rgya gsum chings mol mdzad lugs kun gsal me long* (The Clear Mirror of the Negotiations of the Convention between Britain, China, and Tibet in India in the Wood Tiger Year), hereafter cited as *Kun gsal me long*.<sup>2</sup> This paper compares this document with English records of the Simla Conference, focusing on the translation of political concepts. This comparative analysis illuminates the limitations of research on early 20<sup>th</sup> century Tibetan diplomatic issues that relies only on English and Chinese language records. Finally, this paper also offers new insights into how Tibet articulated its own political status, its relationship with China, and the events that led up to the signing of the treaty. I argue that Tibet did not necessarily concede entirely, but that it was a matter of discrepancies between the translations or even of semantics.

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Tashi Tsering, the director of Amnye Machen Institute, for providing me a copy of this valuable material. Also I sincerely appreciate that Tenzin Norbu Nangsal gave me important advice that helped me in my research.

## 1. The Demise of the Qing Dynasty and the Political Status of Tibet

### 1. 1. *Discrepancies between China and Britain: “Sovereignty”, or “Suzerainty”?*

When analyzing the historical relationship between Tibet and China, many researchers look to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a period when the Qing government was attempting to reform itself into a modern nation while also facing imminent demise. In this period, a discussion of the relationship between Tibet and China began in international society using modern Western concepts such as “sovereignty”, “suzerainty”, “autonomy”, and “independence”. The dispute regarding the political status of Tibet was initially started between China and Britain, ignited by the British expedition to Lhasa in 1903–04.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the British advancement into the Himalayan area, the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama began to establish a relationship with Russia. Russia was a British rival in Central Asia, so Britain considered this relationship to be a threat to British India. At that time, the British policy held that the Qing had limited authority over Tibet. The British called this limited authority “suzerainty”—a term which the Viceroy of India, G. Curzon explained as “a constitutional fiction”<sup>3</sup> as he attempted to establish direct communication with Tibet. Consequently, an armed mission led by F. E. Younghusband was sent to Tibet in the summer of 1903, and a treaty was signed with the Tibetan government in 1904.

Nevertheless, the label of “suzerainty” was unacceptable for Qing officials in Beijing. These officials had learned from their experience at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when they lost their tributaries (such as Korea, Vietnam, and Ryukyu) due largely to foreign powers who considered the Qing’s authority as merely “suzerainty”, just as Britain was now doing in regard to Tibet. Afterwards, in the bilateral negotiations over Tibetan issues with Britain in Beijing in 1905 and 1906, Qing officials clearly realized they had to assert their authority over Tibet as a “sovereignty” (*zhuguo* 主國) instead of a “suzerainty” (*shangguo* 上國) as the British government had insisted upon [Okamoto 2017: 304–15; Cheney 2017]. Due to the huge discrepancy between their two stances in the negotiations, both governments ultimately could not specify whether it was a “suzerainty” or “sovereignty” of Tibet in their new treaty of 27 April 1906. Nevertheless, the British government specified the “Chinese suzerain power over Tibet” in the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, made at the end of “the Great Game” between Russia and Britain in Central Asia. Qing officials then began to go ahead with “New Policies

<sup>3</sup> FO17/1745, Curzon to Hamilton, No. 4C., 8 January 1903, “Russian Intrigues in Tibet”.

(*Xinzheng* 新政)” in an attempt to establish their unequivocal “sovereignty” over Tibet, such as with the Sichuan-Yunnan Frontier Commissioner (*Duban Chuan Dian bianwu dachen* 督辦川滇邊務大臣) Zhao Erfeng’s 趙爾豐 military campaign in Kham, and the Chinese diplomat Zhang Yintang’s 張蔭棠 reform projects in Lhasa [Feng 1996: 185–208; Zhang 2015: 99–137]. Despite strong opposition from the Tibetan government, the Qing government eventually dispatched the Chinese army to Lhasa from Sichuan in February 1910. The 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama was forced to take refuge in India until the summer of 1912. In other words, China’s controversial policy to secure “sovereignty” over Tibet had caused its relationship with Tibet to deteriorate at the last years of the Qing Dynasty.

### 1. 2. *The 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama and the “Independence” of Tibet*

The 1911 Revolution, and the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in February 1912, provided the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama with an opportunity to expel the Chinese army from Tibet and restore his authority. Today, in the Tibetan language, “independence” is translated as *rangtsen* (Tib. *rang btsan*). *Rang* means “self” or “own”, and *btsan* means “force” or “strength”. Even though the origin of this terminology is still unclear, we are able to find the same or similar words in the letters that the Dalai Lama wrote during and after his exile in India to foreign countries such as Britain, Russia, Japan, and the United States.<sup>4</sup> *Rang btsan* also often appears together with *rangwang* (Tib. *rang dbang*),<sup>5</sup> as in “*rang dbang rang btsan*” of the official documents written by Tibetan officials.<sup>6</sup> What exactly

<sup>4</sup> During the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, *btsan po* referred to the king of Tibet, who had supreme dominance. To the best of my knowledge, the first reference to *rang btsan* in the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama’s writings occurs during his exile in Darjeeling in his 4 October 1910 letter to the famous US diplomat William Woodville Rockhill. *The William Woodville Rockhill Additional Papers 1879–1915*. MS Am 2122: 85. See [Kobayashi 2019a: 55–7].

<sup>5</sup> The word *rang dbang*, often translated as “freedom”, was occasionally used similarly to *rang btsan* around 1913. For instance, it is used in a document issued by the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama on 13 February 1913 that Tsipon W. Shakabpa regards as a “Declaration of Independence”. In this document, “independence of country” is specified as “*bod rgyal khab rang dbang*”. See [Shakabpa 1976: vol. 2, pp. 219–24].

<sup>6</sup> In addition to investigating the origin of the *rang btsan* in Tibetan historical materials, it is perhaps worth researching the possibility that *rang dbang rang btsan* was literally translated from the Chinese *zizhu zili* 自主自立, that is the Chinese translation of “free, sovereign, and independent [state]” in the 1864 Beijing published Chinese translation of the book *Elements of International Law* written by Henry Wheaton entitled *Wanguo gongfa* 萬國公法. Tachibana Makoto 橘誠 has shown that the *Wanguo gongfa* was in turn translated into Mongolian around the time of the collapse of the Qing Dynasty. See [Tachibana 2011: 149–66]. Therefore, we should also consider the possibility that *rang dbang rang btsan* is a translation of the Mongolian expres-

did the Dalai Lama mean when using *rang btsan*? To examine how this term related to his stance at that time, I first look briefly at how other countries that had relationships with the Qing, like Mongolia and Korea, asserted their “independence”.

Mongolia is a region often mentioned in tandem with Tibet as a key example of Qing ethnic conflict at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; the Bogd Khaan government, which was established mainly by princes from Khalkha, declared their “independence” from the Qing on 1 December 1911. These Mongolian princes, who had previously enthroned successive Qing emperors as Khaans from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, then established their own country and enthroned their own new emperor (Bogd Khaan), the Jebtsundampa Khutukhtu.

For Korea, a country which had been a “dependency” (*shuguo* 屬國), or tributary of the Qing, “independence” was specified in the Shimonoseki Treaty which ended the Sino-Japanese War in 1895. Afterwards, Korea gained its independence by successfully breaking away from the Qing through two major events: the establishment of the “Great Korean Empire” (*Tae-Han cheguk* 大韓帝國) in 1897, and the signing of the Treaty of Commerce between Korea and the Qing in 1899, which formally recognized Korea’s equal status with the Qing.<sup>7</sup>

The parallel Tibetan official claim of independence was the Dalai Lama’s letters to King George V, Queen Mary, and the Ministers of the British government. The Dalai Lama wrote these letters around the beginning of 1913, immediately after he arrived in Lhasa from India, and entrusted the Tibetan aristocrat Lungshar Dorjé Tseggyel (*Lung shar rdo rje tshe rgyal*, 1881–ca. 1940), to personally deliver these letters to London on his trip overseas while escorting four Tibetan students to receive a Western education. I have already discussed this event and the contents of the letters in my recently published article [Kobayashi 2019b]. Due to its significance in relation to this article, I would like to summarize the main parts of the discussion here and add new arguments as well.

In letters to King George V and to the Secretary of State for India, Robert Crew, the Dalai Lama emphasized the fact that “Tibet and China have been in a priest-patron relationship” (*rgya bod sngar nas mchod yon rim ’brel*).<sup>8</sup> The words *mchod yon* (priest and patron) referred to the relationship between the Dalai Lama and the Qing emperor

sion “öbestüben ejerkejü öbertegen toytanımı” used to translate *zizhu zili*. However, I have not yet discovered a Tibetan source indicating the relationship between *rang btsan* and political ideas of the late Qing period or Outer Mongolia, and thus this research requires deeper investigation.

<sup>7</sup> Okamoto Takashi 岡本隆司 explains this process as a change from “dependent sovereignty” (*shuguo zizhu* 屬國自主) to “independent sovereignty” (*duli zizhu* 獨立自主). For more on this, refer to [Okamoto 2017: 292–315].

<sup>8</sup> Correspondence (in the Tibetan language) from the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama to King George V, 1913, L/P&S/11/64, P. 3937, India Office Records, British Library in London, Great Britain; the correspondence to Robert Crew is also attached in the same file. See [Kobayashi 2019b].

and further signified that the Dalai Lama had always been the highest authority in Tibet since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, that the Dalai Lama was the center of Tibetan Buddhism, and that the Qing emperor was to protect Buddhism. The Dalai Lama asserted that the historical relationship between Tibet and China (or the Qing) was not based on the relationship between ruler and subject. In other words, the Dalai Lama criticized the Qing for unilaterally attempting to change “the priest-patron relationship”, a relationship of equal status, into a relationship between ruler and subject. Therefore, the Dalai Lama’s concept of *rang btsan* was different from the other cases of “independence”—such as in countries like Mongolia and Korea, where their relationship with the Qing emperor was based not on equality, but hierarchy.<sup>9</sup>

To show how the Dalai Lama thought about his historical relationship with the Qing emperors and how he used the word *rang btsan*, I will present my close analysis of a letter the Dalai Lama wrote to King George V. The Dalai Lama first, before his request for British support, reminded the king that “Tibet and China have been in a priest-patron relationship” (*rgya bod sngar nas mchod yon rim ’brel*). To analyze the specific requests the Dalai Lama made of Britain in this letter, I will present my English translation of the corresponding section in two parts I will title *A* and *B*.

Part *A* is as follows:

[I would propose, that] if it pleases [the King], Russia and Britain could appoint representatives in Lhasa after the [two] countries have consulted, in order for [our Tibetan political and religious] system [of governance] to continue to develop primarily upon the “independence” of Tibet [in regard to its] religious and political power (*chos srid dbang byus rang btsan*).

<sup>9</sup> The phraseology of the first part of the Mongol-Tibetan Treaty signed in Urga on 11 January 1913 stated: “We, Tibet and Mongolia, having achieved independence from the Manchu dominion and separated from China, became independent states respectively” (*rang re bod sog gnyis many+ju’i rgyal khab gyi mnga’ ’og nas thon rgya nag po dang bral te bod sog so so rgyal khab rang btsan pa bgyis*). This quote implies that Tibet was under control of the Manchus before the 1911 Revolution. However, it is doubtful that this understanding was shared within the Tibetan government, since the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama reiterated that Tibet was not under the control of the Qing in his own writings, just as I examined in this article. The Mongol-Tibetan Treaty was first drafted in Tibetan [Tsyrempilov 2013]. However, it seems that phraseology and terminology of this article largely reflect the ideas of the Mongolian princes, by claiming their independence from the Manchus and establishing their own new administration, the Bogd Khaan government. Detailed research on the Mongol-Tibetan Treaty has only just begun, and further studies are needed to understand the negotiation process of this treaty.

“Then otherwise”, the Dalai Lama continues immediately after the above quotation with the request of part *B*:

[In order for] no harm to come to Tibet by the Chinese, [I would request] your assistance in conferring with various foreign countries (*phyi rgyal khag*) who will come to support the independent power of Tibet [in regard to our] main affairs (*nang don bod dbang rang btsan*).

In part *A*, we can find that the Dalai Lama considered the establishment of diplomatic relations with both Russia and Britain—in accordance with the diplomatic custom of Western countries wherein representatives would be exchanged in dispatch—as the most important aspect of Tibet’s security and *rang btsan*. According to contemporary Tibetan usage *rang btsan* as almost always translated as “independence”, and this is how I translate it here. However, *rang btsan* was not interpreted as “independence” by Laden La, the Sikkimese translator who interpreted the above letters to the British. Laden La joined the trip to Britain in the service of his employer, the British India official, Basil J. Gould, who accompanied the Lungshar delegation to Britain in 1913 [Kobayashi 2019: 128–9].

The Dalai Lama realized that it would not be easy for Great Britain and Russia to fulfill his request due to a restriction of the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 which required the two countries recognize Chinese “suzerainty” over Tibet.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, despite the requests of *A* above, the Dalai Lama clearly mentioned what the next best option would be in the case that dispatching representatives from Russia and Britain to Lhasa could not be accomplished. The Dalai Lama asked Britain to negotiate with “various foreign countries” (*phyi rgyal khag*) in order to, at the very least, avoid Chinese interference with Tibet and to support the “independent power of Tibet [in regard to their] main affairs” (*nang don bod dbang rang btsan*).

This letter to Britain is too short to capture the Dalai Lama’s understanding of Tibet’s position within the international community. Which countries are referred to by the phrase “various foreign countries” is not specified. Furthermore, what “*nang don*”, translated here as “main affairs”, signifies also requires further examination, because it also could be literally translated as “internal affairs” or “domestic affairs”. How we interpret “*nang don*” here is important, as it might influence our understanding of “*rang btsan*”. If the Dalai Lama, in Part *B*, used “*nang don*” as “domestic affairs”, which is clearly distinguished from “foreign affairs”, “*rang btsan*” might be quite a different concept from “independence”—according to the common usage among Western pow-

<sup>10</sup> On the 31 August 1907 convention relating to Persia, Afghanistan, and Tibet, see [MacMurray 1921: 674–8].

ers, is an “independent” country which controls both its domestic and diplomatic affairs.

However, if we look at his Tibetan letter to Russian Tsar Nikolai II in 1912<sup>11</sup>—a letter which was written in the same context as the letter to Britain—we can grasp the Dalai Lama’s intention more clearly. The Dalai Lama requested that “[in case dispatching representatives from Russia and Britain to Lhasa could not be accomplished], Russia could discuss [with other influential countries], not bounded by the treaty terms [of the Anglo-Russian Convention], such as Germany (*sger ma ni*), France (*ha gol*), and Japan (*nyi hong*), and persuade them to establish representative [officers] in Lhasa”. This passage reveals that the “various foreign countries”, in the letter to Britain, referred to the countries which were not under the restriction of the Anglo-Russian Convention—such as France, Germany, and Japan. In other words, the Dalai Lama pursued relationships with foreign powers aside from Britain and Russia, and his letter to the Russian Tsar indicates that the “*nang don*” in the letter to Britain covers both domestic and foreign affairs.

How did the Dalai Lama interpret the “suzerainty” of China over Tibet, which Britain and Russia specified in the Anglo-Russian Convention? In the aforementioned letter to the Tsar, the Dalai Lama articulated that “there was much desire to declare Tibet as independent (*bod rgyal khang rang btsan pa*), the British, however, continue to insist that Tibet [is] externally a part of China (*bod 'di phyi rgya khongs*)”. The phrase “Tibet [is] externally a part of China”, is written in the Tibetan text here as “*bod 'di phyi rgya khongs*” and this is most likely a translation of the British policy on the political status of Tibet that recognized Chinese “suzerainty” over Tibet. However, this unclear interpretation gives us the impression that it was quite difficult for native or second language speakers of Tibetan to translate the English political concept of “suzerainty” with traditional Tibetan vocabulary at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We can see a similar phraseology in the Tibetan translation of “suzerainty” in the Simla Convention in 1914, and I will discuss it more in the next section.

To summarize my discussion of these two letters from the Dalai Lama to Britain and Russia, according to the Dalai Lama, “*rang btsan*” meant that Tibet would gain international recognition from countries such as Britain and Russia in order to secure the politico-religious system of Tibet. On the other hand, at the very least, he wanted to avoid Chinese interference with Tibet. The Dalai Lama thought that “*rang btsan*” contradicted the British policy towards Tibet, even though there was no technical terminology in Tibetan to translate “suzerainty”. The British government, however, did not inter-

<sup>11</sup> [Jampa Samten and Tsyrempilov 2012: 64–5, 103–4, 132, OF18617]. I added some minor changes to the English translation by Jampa Samten and Nikolay Tsyrempilov based on the arguments of my paper. Although this letter does not refer to a specific date, Jampa Samten identified the date of its composition as late as 1912. See [Jampa Samten 2010: 368].



pret “*rang btsan*” as “independence”, due most likely to the then lack of uniformity in translation between the two terms. In other words, we can conclude that Tibet and Britain participated in the Simla Conference of 1913 and 1914 without a common understanding of the key political terms being employed.

## 2. The Translated Concepts of the Simla Conference

### 2. 1. *The Tibetan Record of the Simla Conference: Kun gsal me long*

John N. Jordan, the Minister of the British government in Beijing, sent a memorandum on 17 August 1912 to solve the aforementioned issue of dispute on Tibet’s political status with the demise of the Qing Dynasty. This memorandum explained the principles of British policy on the Tibet issue to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China.<sup>12</sup> In this memorandum, Britain required that China sign a new tripartite agreement between Tibet, China, and Britain. While recognizing China’s suzerain rights over Tibet, the document made explicit that Tibet would maintain the right to decide its own domestic affairs, thereby rejecting Chinese “sovereignty” over Tibet.

The Chinese government wanted bilateral negotiations with Britain without the participation of a Tibetan representative. However, under British pressure, China eventually agreed to dispatch Chen Yifan 陳貽範 to the tripartite conference [Lamb 1966: 469–71]. This tripartite conference was to be held from October 1913 to July 1914 in Simla, India, where the main topic between the three representatives was the political status of Tibet.

The *Kun gsal me long*, which this paper mentioned in the Introduction, is a remarkable text for researching how the Tibetan plenipotentiary articulated his opinion on the political status of Tibet in the Tibetan language. It is also a unique resource for understanding British and Chinese assertions in the conference, especially considering the difficulty of accessing relevant diplomatic documents in the People’s Republic of China. The text is currently stored in the private office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and a copy is in the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamshala, India. The authors of the text were the Tibetan plenipotentiary at the Simla Conference, Shatra Penjor Dorjé (ca. 1861–1919), and his assistant at the conference, Trimön Norbu Wanggyel (1874–1945?; see [Petech 1973: 181–3]). There remain unsolved questions concerning the *Kun gsal me long*, such as the date of its composition and the number of copies made.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> FO371/1328, Memorandum communicated to Wai-chiao Pu by Sir. J. Jordan, enclosed in Jordan to Grey, no. 349, 17 August 1912.

<sup>13</sup> Trimön was stationed at Kham from 1922 to 1926 as the *Domé* (Eastern Tibet) Governor.

However, through a comparative analysis between the *Kun gsal me long* and the English materials which many researchers have used such as FO, IOR, and the *Boundary Question*, I concluded that this text is a valuable source in analyzing how Tibet perceived and/or understood the modern concepts and terms related to state-building and international relations at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century [Kobayashi 2014: 193]. In the following section, I will use the *Kun gsal me long* to examine the translated political concepts discussed at the Simla Conference.

## 2. 2. *The Terminology Concerning the Political Status of Tibet in the Negotiations*

At the first meeting of the conference, on 13 October 1913, the Tibetan plenipotentiary submitted a statement that asserted Tibet's political status, rightful territory, and the authority of the Dalai Lama in Tibet. This letter also asked for compensation of damages done by the Chinese military campaigns in Eastern Tibet at the end of the Qing Dynasty. As for the political status of Tibet, according to the *Kun gsal me long*, the Tibetan plenipotentiary wrote the following statement:

China and Tibet have never been ruled by each other. Therefore, in an article of the agreement which we will sign [in this conference], we shall decide that, hereafter, not only will China and Tibet mutually not interfere with [each other's] power, but also that Tibet is an independent country (*rgyal khab rang btsan*), and the Dalai Lama is the leader of all temporal and spiritual affairs.<sup>14</sup>

Tibet denied that its relationship with China was based on political hierarchy. Rather, its assertion of *rang btsan* is consistent with the assertions which Tibet had made before the Simla Conference. The above statement was translated into the English version shown below.<sup>15</sup>

Tibet and China have never been under each other and will never associate with

See [Peteck 1973: 97]; therefore, it seems that he completed the compilation of the *Kun gsal me long* before 1922. Understanding this issue requires further information. See [Kobayashi 2014].

<sup>14</sup> *Kun gsal me long*, 6a.

<sup>15</sup> This translation was undertaken primarily by Kazi Dawa Samdup (1868–1922). Hailing from Sikkim, he was the translator and subordinate of Charles Bell, Political Officer in Sikkim. After the conference, he compiled an English-Tibetan dictionary, translated Tibetan Buddhist texts into English, and in his last years served as a professor at Calcutta University. See [Samdup 2008; Kobayashi 2014; Martin 2016].

each other in future. It is decided that Tibet is an independent state and that the Precious Protector, the Dalai Lama, is the Ruler of Tibet, in all temporal as well as in spiritual affairs.<sup>16</sup>

*Rgyal khab rang btsan* was clearly translated into “an independent state”. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of the same month, Chinese plenipotentiary asserted as follows:

Powerless and helpless were the Tibetans that they again went to China for assistance. To their supplication China responded at once by sending over 50,000 soldiers to Tibet; and accordingly the Gurkhas were driven out of the country. Tibet was then definitely placed under the sovereignty of China.<sup>17</sup>

The Chinese plenipotentiary claimed “sovereignty” over Tibet and denied Tibetan independence by referring to China’s historical relationship with Tibet during the Qing period. However, if we look at *Kun gsal me long* 9a, we can find the following Tibetan translation:

[Because of the invasion of the Gurkha,] Tibet was in a hopeless situation, [Tibet] requested that China give them assistance again. Having immediately responded to [this request], [China] dispatched 50,000 troops towards Tibet, and [they] expelled and chased away the Gurka troops. Since that time, all the powers of the land and community in [the] Tibetan region were put under Chinese control (*bod khams kyi sa sde dbang tshang ma rgya nag mnga' 'og tu bcug 'dug*).<sup>18</sup>

“Under the sovereignty”, was translated as *mnga' 'og* (“under the rule”, or “under the power”). In the *Kun gsal me long*, however, *mnga' 'og* is not an exact translation of “sovereignty”, but was also used as the translation of other phraseology that referred to the relationship between rulers and subjects. Moreover, even though nowadays, “sovereignty” is often translated as *bdag dbang* [Goldstein 2001: 256], a combination of *bdag* (ruler, lord, or owner) and *dbang* (power and authority), this word is not to be found in the *Kun gsal me long*. Therefore, the translations of English terminology in the *Kun gsal me long* indicate the strong possibility that the Tibetan language at that time did not have

<sup>16</sup> FO371/1613, no. 50097, Statement of Tibetan Claims, Annex IV to the Proceeding of the First Meeting of Tibet Conference held at Simla, 13 October 1913.

<sup>17</sup> IOR/L/P&S/10/342, P. 4963, The Chinese Counter-Proposals to the Statement of Tibetan Claims, 30 October 1913.

<sup>18</sup> *Kun gsal me long*, 9a.

terminology equivalent to the English political concept of “sovereignty”.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, how was “suzerainty” translated in the *Kun gsal me long*? This was just as controversial a concept between China and Britain in the conference as “sovereignty”. The second article of the reconciliation proposal, which the British plenipotentiary Henry McMahon presented on 17 February 1914, revealed the British perspective on the political status of Tibet.

And Government[s] of Great Britain and China recognizing that **(1) Tibet is a State under the suzerainty, but not the Sovereignty of China, and (2) recognizing also the autonomy of Outer Tibet, engage to respect the territorial integrity of the country, and to abstain from interference in the administration of Outer Tibet (including the selection and appointment of Dalai Lama), which shall remain in the hands of the Tibetan Government at Lhasa. ...**<sup>20</sup>

McMahon specified Chinese suzerainty over Tibet while recognizing Tibetan autonomy. At the same time, to mediate the border demarcation conflict between Tibet and China, McMahon divided Tibet into two: an “Outer Tibet” with autonomous rights, and an “Inner Tibet” located in the border region.

This reconciliation proposal caused serious opposition from China, which strongly asserted “sovereignty” over Tibet. However, it was unavoidable for China to accept “suzerainty”, because China had at that time already recognized “suzerainty” over Mongolia in negotiations with Russia [Tachibana 2011: 149–66]. Therefore, Chen Yifan eventually agreed to specify “suzerainty”, provided that the representatives remove “but not the sovereignty” and insert that “Tibet was a portion of Chinese territory” [*The Boundary Question...* 1940: 88].

The Tibetan plenipotentiary then asserted his opposition to this reconciliation by Britain on 7 March. However, he opposed not the mention of the political status of Tibet, but the demarcation of the border with China. Moreover, if we look at the English materials, Tibet did not assert its political status as an “independent state” since it had already done so on during the conference proceedings on 13 October 1913. Did Tibet recognize Chinese “suzerainty” without strong opposition? To analyze the Tibetan understanding

<sup>19</sup> It is noteworthy that *zhuquan*, the Chinese translation of *sovereignty*, is interpreted as *rang btsan gyi dbang cha*, which literally means “power of independence” in the “Seventeen Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet”, which was signed between the Chinese Communist Party and the delegation of the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama on 23 May 1951 [Xizang zizhiqu dang’an guan 1995: no. 100]. This indicates that a fixed translation between *rang btsan* and *duli* 獨立, the Chinese concept of *independence*, was not established in the early 1950s.

<sup>20</sup> [*The Boundary Question...* 1940: 91–5, Proposed Tripartite Convention].

of reconciliation, I will examine the Tibetan translation of the second article.

Both China and Britain recognize **1. Tibet as an area controlled by the Chinese government externally** (*phyi rgyar rgya bzhung gi mnga' khongs yin*). **2. However, we shall definitely respect the independence of the country [in regards to their] main affairs** (*nang don ryal khab rang btsan*), and respect[ing] that all the ruling power over Outer Tibet will belong to the Tibetan government, [we will] demarcate the border of the territory [of Tibet at this conference].<sup>21</sup>

“Suzerainty” was not translated using specific terminology, but rather through explanatory words such as “a controlled area of the Chinese government externally” (*phyi rgyar rgya bzhung gi mnga' khongs yin*). As I mentioned in the last section, this expression was almost the same as the “Tibet is externally a part of China” (*bod 'di phyi rgya knongs yin*) that the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama used in his letter to Russia explaining British policy toward Tibet.

However, what is noteworthy here is that “*rang btsan*” is used to translate “autonomy”. Did it really mean that Tibet was “*rang btsan*” at the same time as being “a controlled area of the Chinese government externally”? Is the political status revealed by “*rang btsan*” in Tibetan merely what “autonomy” means in English?

We must consider that the Tibetan plenipotentiary did not necessarily use *rang btsan* as a fixed parallel translation of “independence” or “autonomy”. The term “*rgyal khab rang btsan*” used in the Tibetan statement on 13 October, as discussed in the beginning of this section, was translated into “independent state” in English. However, “autonomy” in the above reconciliation proposal was also translated into *rang btsan*. Because of this lack of consistency, we need to discuss the usage of *rang btsan* in the context of the Tibetan language separately from the English concepts.

As I mentioned in the first section of this article, the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, in his letter to Britain, required establishing a diplomatic relationship with both Britain and Russia to accomplish *rang btsan*. At the same time, however, as the next best option in the case of the failure of the above request, he asked Britain to support the “independent power of Tibet [in regard to its] main affairs” (*nang don bod dbang rang btsan*), which would at least prevent Chinese interference with Tibet. Therefore, *rang btsan* was a concept deeply associated with an agenda regarding how to remove Chinese influence over Tibet.

Based on this understanding, if we look at the above Tibetan translation of the British reconciliation proposal again, we can find that **1. Tibet would be treated as “a part**

<sup>21</sup> *Kun gsal me long*, 56a–b.

of an area controlled by the Chinese government externally”, and this was connected to the second sentence 2. by “however” (*kyang*), which was not mentioned in the original English version. It emphasizes the 2. “independence of the country [in regard to] main affairs” (*nang don ryal khab rang btsan*), which is close to the phraseology the Dalai Lama used in his letter to Britain in 1913. Thus, the Tibetan plenipotentiary stressed 2. that they translate “autonomy” into *rang btsan* in an attempt to devalue Chinese authority.<sup>22</sup> In other words, Tibet attempted to bring the article close to its own assertion by translating “autonomy” into *rang btsan*, and this was because of the lack of a parallel translation between the English and Tibetan terminologies at that time.

### 3. The Signing of the Simla Convention

On the one hand, as mentioned above, Shatra planned a draft of the treaty that translated the English term “autonomy” in Tibetan as *rang btsan*. On the other hand, rather than the issue of political status, he focused more on other issues such as the demarcation of the boundaries between Tibet and China. The following quotation from the *Kun gsal me long* refers to the time when Shatra signed the treaty after the negotiations regarding the boundary problem on 27 April 1914.

Regarding the ruling power of the territory of Outer Tibet, the draft convention that will be submitted today does not need any alterations at all and it should be carried out to the final [agreement]. The power of the land and community (*sa sde*) [which is] represented by independence of Tibet (*bod rang btsan gyis mtshon sa sde dbang byus*) is excellent in all respects and was never previously [included in the negotiations]. In no way can it be better than it is [even if we continued to negotiate]. Therefore, I will sign immediately.<sup>23</sup>

Shatra thought that the *rang btsan* of Tibet would be secured after concluding the negotiations delineating the boundaries of Tibet and made his decision to sign the previously

<sup>22</sup> It allows us to reconsider “*phyi rgyar*” or “externally”, in the Tibetan translated phraseology of “suzerainty” in the first sentence 1. “*Phyi rgyar*” can also be translated as “ostensibly” or “on the surface”, and the Tibetan plenipotentiary perhaps purposely used it in order to devalue Chinese authority over Tibet. It is noteworthy that the Tibetan plenipotentiary used the words, “*nang don*” and “*phyi rgyar*”, which could be interpreted in a way beneficial to Tibet as “main affairs” and “ostensibly”, when they tried to interpret “autonomy of Outer Tibet” and “suzerainty of China” respectively.

<sup>23</sup> *Kun gsal me long*, 64b.

mentioned draft of the treaty.

Thus, if we look at the *Kun gsal me long*, we can find that Shatra did not easily make concessions on the conditions of Chinese “suzerainty” and Tibetan “autonomy”. His purpose in accomplishing *rang btsan* was a coherent assertion, and it never changed even after Britain specified the political status of Tibet as not independent but autonomous. He translated “autonomy” into *rang btsan* in order to devalue Chinese “suzerainty”, and to focus more on the border issue so as to fulfill the actual conditions of *rang btsan*. Therefore, he agreed to sign the draft of the treaty.

This Tibetan translation was also reflected in the second article of the final agreement of the Simla Conference on 3 July 1914, as shown in the side-by-side quotation below.<sup>24</sup> Here is the *English* of Simla Convention Article 2:

The Governments of Great Britain and China recognizing that Tibet is under the suzerainty of China, and recognizing also the autonomy of Outer Tibet, engage to respect the territorial integrity of the country, and to abstain from interference in the administration of Outer Tibet (including the selection and installation of the Dalai Lama), which shall remain in the hands of the Tibetan Government at Lhasa.

Here is my English translation of the corresponding *Tibetan*:

The British and the Chinese governments recognize that Tibet is a part of China externally (*phyi rgyar rgya nag gi mnga' khongs yin*). However, we shall respect the independence of the country regarding the main affairs of Outer Tibet as we know it (*bod phyi ma'i nang don rgyal khag rang dbang rang btsan yin pa*). [We will] demarcate the border of the territory [of Tibet at this conference]. [We will not] interfere in the ruling power over the main issues of Outer Tibet such as the recognition and enthronement of the Dalai Lama, and shall recognize that all of the power will belong to the Tibetan government itself.

The final draft in English removed “a State” from “Tibet is a State under the suzerainty” in the reconciliation proposal on 17 February 1914. Nevertheless, there is no remarkable difference of phraseology between the Tibetan version and the translation of the reconciliation proposal, and this Tibetan version also stated “the independence of the country” (*rgyal khag rang dbang rang btsan*) clearly.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> FO93/105/2, Convention, United Kingdom, China and Tibet, 3 July 1914.

<sup>25</sup> “Autonomy” is in the contemporary Tibetan language translated as *rang skyong*, which means literally “self-rule” or “self-protection”. However, this term is not found in the *Kun gsal me long*. It is still unclear at what point the Tibetan language began to conceptually distinguish

## Conclusion

Through the above analysis, this paper illuminated the limitations of the research that has already been done on early 20<sup>th</sup> century Tibetan diplomatic issues that has relied solely on English concepts such as “sovereignty”, “suzerainty”, “autonomy”, and “independence”.

Whether the Chinese authority over Tibet was “suzerain” or “sovereign” was the fundamental conflict between Britain and China regarding the political status of Tibet after the collapse of the Qing Dynasty. Tibet did not have the technical terminology to translate these political concepts, and as such did not participate in this “suzerainty” or “sovereignty” debate. Before the Simla Conference, the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama had already felt a sense of danger about the British government’s policy of incorporating Tibet into the territory of China. This sense of danger was in spite of the fact that the British concept of “suzerainty” was used to water down Chinese authority over Tibet.

In the same way, the argument about whether the political status of Tibet was defined as “independence” or “autonomy” in English was not a primary concern of the Tibetan plenipotentiary. The fixed parallel translation between *rang btsan* and “independence” had not been established at that time, and during the Simla Conference the Tibetan plenipotentiary continued to use *rang btsan* as a translation of “autonomy” so as to devalue Chinese authority.

This Tibetan effort of using *rang btsan* in the Tibetan documents, however, did not necessarily affect negotiations at the international conference. As researchers have already examined, countries such as China, Japan, and Korea which used Chinese characters, gradually started using the new Chinese concepts which translated Western political terminology such as “independence”. Mongolia followed by also attempting to interpret these modern concepts in their Mongolian translation of the Chinese *Wanguo gongfa*, which was in turn a translation of Henry Wheaton’s *Elements of International Law*.

the Western concepts of “independence” and “autonomy”. Nevertheless, there is the possibility that *rang skyong* was a translated version of *zizhi* 自治, the Chinese concept of “autonomy”, which is literally translated as “self-rule” or “self-government” and was broadly spread throughout China in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As far as I know, the first case of the term, *rang skyong*, can be seen in the “Proclamation of the Southwest Military and Administrative Commission and the Southwest Military Area of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army”, which was issued in Tibetan and Chinese in the name of Liu Bocheng 劉伯承, He Long 賀龍, and Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 when they conducted a military campaign against Chamdo in 1950 [Xizang zizhiqu dang’anguan 1995: no. 99]. As for my view on how the Tibetan concept of “autonomy” emerged in history, see [Kobayashi 2017].



Mongolia even created their own new words during negotiations with Russia and China after the collapse of the Qing Dynasty [Tachibana 2011: 149–66]. Tibet was by contrast, as far as I have found by examining the limited materials from the Tibetan government, more or less not involved in these types of translation projects among the countries in East Asia. Moreover, it seems that at this time, Tibet had only just begun the project of interpreting and analyzing modern English concepts and perhaps Chinese ones as well.<sup>26</sup> We have to carefully examine how the translation of modern concepts in Tibet at this time affected the destiny of Tibet.

—*Edited by Joseph Williams*

<sup>26</sup> In 1907, Zhang Yintang, the Imperial High Commissioner in Lhasa, suggested that *Wanguo gongfa* should be translated into Tibetan. There are no Qing documents that showed that this policy was implemented. Zhang Yintang to Waiwubu (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Guangxu 31 (1907) [Wu 1994: 1343–53].