

### 3 The Gorkha-Tibet War of 1788–1789

Tibet held a pivotal position in the old trans-Himalayan trade network, serving as a vital hub for exporting various commodities to Nepal. Among these goods were salt, wool, silk, horses, and sheep, which formed the backbone of commerce between the two regions.<sup>154</sup> In return, Nepal primarily exported items like rice, lentils, spices, clothing materials, and silver coins,<sup>155</sup> with the latter being a crucial source of revenue for the Nepalese government.<sup>156</sup>

The Kathmandu Valley was part of the important trade route between India and Tibet or China.<sup>157</sup> According to Komatsubara (2022), the earlier treaty between the Malla King Pratapa Malla and Tibet prioritised the route through the Kathmandu valley instead of those via Sikkim or Bhutan, while Kyirong was often under the control of the Malla Kings since the seventeenth century. Jaya Prakash Malla signed an agreement with Tibet to utilise the Nuwakot-Kyirong route in 1758. The trade routes through Nyalam and Kyirong were both essential for the Kathmandu rulers. Before the Gorkha conquest of the Kathmandu Valley, Prithivi Narayan Shah already seized Nuwakot in 1744 and soon blocked the trade route via Nyalam around 1759/1760. Thus, the Mallas were weakened. In 1775, Gorkha signed a new agreement with Tibet to make sure trade between them should be done via the Kyirong and the Nyalam routes.<sup>158</sup>

The relationship between Nepal and Tibet underwent a significant transformation when a dispute arose over border and trade matters, including the accusation that the Tibetans mixed dust into the salt sold to Nepal. But the conflicts escalated especially over the Kathmandu

154 Shakabpa 1967, 156.

155 Tibet had no mint of their own: Petech 1950a, 288.

156 Kirkpatrick 1811, 217–18; V.K. Manandhar 2004, vol. 1, 72; Acharya 2018, 58.

157 See Camman 1951, App. D for a list of traded articles from 1782.

158 See also BLBJL, vol. 6, QL 53/9/11.



Figure 2: Silver Tibetan coin produced in Nepal, early Shah period (source: Wikimedia Commons)

Valley's exclusive right to mint silver coins for Tibet. For this silver lumps with a small portion of gold dust were sent to the mints. The coins (*mahendramallī*, Tib. *bal thang* or *ṭamka*) depicted on one side Lhasa and, on the other, name, title, and emblem of the Malla rulers. The profit for the Malla kings, especially Jaya Prakash Malla from Kathmandu and Ranjit Malla, the last king of Bhaktapur, was considerable amounting to 1 *lakh* per year<sup>159</sup> or 12 percent respective 4 percent “being derived from the gold dust, and eight per cent arising from the alloy of the mohur.”<sup>160</sup>

The debasement of the *mahendramallī* by the Malla kings resulted in a significant reduction in their silver content—a decrease of nearly one-half of their value.<sup>161</sup> This prompted Tibet to react and impose unfavourable trade conditions on both countries. When Prithvi Narayan Shah came to power, he took the initiative to mint again pure silver coins, struck in his name. In his<sup>162</sup> *Divyopadeśa* he had laid down the principle, that the mint should be kept unpolluted: “Keep the mint pure.”<sup>163</sup> He then attempted to enforce the new *mahendramallī* in Tibet and prohibit the adulterated coins blended with copper. According to Shakabpa's historiography, Prithvi Narayan threatened Tibet with an invasion if his conditions were not met.<sup>164</sup>

However, the Tibetans rejected the new currency, fearing it would cause significant economic harm and pave the way for military invasion.

159 Kirkpatrick 1811, 211.

160 De la Couperie 1881, 343.

161 Kirkpatrick 1811, 339; de la Couperie 1881, 344; Cammann 1951, 109; Rhodes 1980; Rhodes, Gabrisch and Pontecorvo della Rocchetta 1989.

162 The authorship is debated, see Michaels 2024, 309; Lubin 2024.

163 Stiller 1968, 45; cp. Stiller 1989, 18 and 1975, 191.

164 Shakabpa 1967, 158.



Figure 3: Silver Tibetan coin produced in Nepal, late Malla period (source: Wikimedia Commons)

They insisted that they would only accept the new coins if Prithvi Narayan agreed to recall all the earlier coins from Nepal. They pleaded with the king to continue minting the adulterated coins (Figures 2 and 3), which they used alongside the pure ones, maintaining the same value as the debased currency. This dispute over currency quality and redemption continued over almost twenty years. It engaged Prithvi Narayan's son Pratap Simha Shah, who ascended the throne in 1775, and the later regent Bahadur Shah, who in 1785 became the de facto ruler because Pratap's son Rana Bahadur Shah (Figure 4) called *Gorkhāmāhārāja* (“Gorkha King”) throughout the Report of VS 1850, was still an infant.

Even after ten years, when Bahadur Shah proposed introducing at least an exchange rate for the two currencies, the Tibetans remained adamant and continued to use both *mahendramallīs* equally. This had a profound impact on the trade relations between Nepal and Tibet, nearly bringing economic exchange between the two countries to a standstill. Bahadur Shah attempted to reach an agreement, but the Tibetans instead threatened him to assemble an army of 125,000 soldiers.<sup>165</sup> The Nepalese proposal of a meeting to settle the matter was first rejected by the Tibetans.

While these trade and currency disputes continued without major ramifications, occasional reports were sent to Beijing but often obstructed by the ambans in Lhasa.<sup>166</sup> Thus, Bahadur Shah attempted to directly contact the Chinese Emperor Qianlong (Figure 5),<sup>167</sup> as China

165 Sandhi of VS 1850, 2v.

166 Haenisch 1959, 8.

167 Qian-long is the name for his era. Gao-zong (lit. “the high patriarch”) was his posthumous name when he received offerings in the ancestral temple of the Empire. Another posthumous name for him was Chun Huang-di (Mnc.



Figure 4: King Rana Bahadur Shah (1775–1806, r. 1778–1799), unknown date (source: Wikimedia Commons)

held formal suzerainty over Tibet, albeit with minimal exercise in preceding years.

An incident that triggered the Gorkhali's invasion in July 1788 highlighted the arrogance of the Chinese ambassadors (*amban*)<sup>168</sup> to Tibet: The *amban* Kinglin (Chin. 慶麟 Qing-lin), for instance, a Mongol bannerman, refused to deliver the petition (*arji*) of King Rana Bahadur Shah because it was written in a foreign language and script, deeming it incomprehensible, and returned it to Nepal.<sup>169</sup> Upon learning of this

Yongkiyangga Hūwangdi, “the complete Emperor”). His Manchu name was Aisin-Gioro Hung Li, in Pinyin Ai-xin-Jue-luo Hong-li.

168 On the history of the *ambans* in Tibet see Li 2002, 173–236. For the internal tension among the *ambans* in Lhasa between the wars, see Komatsubara 2006.

169 This is confirmed by in the Kyirong treat, see Komatsubara 2017, 189, 194.



Figure 5: Emperor Qianlong (1711–1799) in his formal robe in 1791 (source: Wikimedia Commons. Palace Museum in Peking, no. 00006461)

incident and other crimes of Kinglin, the Emperor's fury was evident, and he punished Kinglin by imposing a three-year sentence of wearing the wooden collar or cangue (Chin. 枷號, *jiahao*).<sup>170</sup> In an edict, the Emperor expressed his displeasure:

If the people of any foreign peoples with the desire to pay tribute and submit a letter approach the governors residing in the border area with this request, then the governors at the border simply must report it and wait for my order on the question of whether or not to allow them. And whether there is any naughtiness in their letter text, how this is to be treated, that is then up to my

170 Haenisch 1959, 9.

decision. If there is a small thing, I will reprimand and lecture it. If there is a gross violation, I will send out an army and fight them.<sup>171</sup>

In May<sup>172</sup>—or, according to others, June<sup>173</sup>, July<sup>174</sup> or August<sup>175</sup> 1788—, the conflict resulted in a first punitive attack on Tibet launched by the Gorkhali army and in the occupation of some border towns—Kerung (Kyirong), Kuti (Nyalam), Phalavan (Phula)<sup>176</sup> as well as a significant portion of Tibet's south-western territory reaching up to Shelkar.

Bahadur Shah dared to take the step because he suspected that China would not intervene in the conflict. The Gorkhali forces—allegedly 3,000 men<sup>177</sup>—under the joint command of *kājīs* Damodara Pande and Bom [Bam] Bahadur Shah, Ranjit Kumvar and others entered Tibet in at least two wings (see Map 1):<sup>178</sup> One went to Kerung along the Trishuli River that was conquered; and another one that followed the Bhotia Kosi River via Kuti (Nyalam) to Tingri about 250 km from Kuti.<sup>179</sup> In August, a fierce battle was fought at Shikarjong (Shelkar town, currently in Tingri County),<sup>180</sup> in which the Tibetans were severely beaten<sup>181</sup> because the standing troops could not hold off the invasion due to a lack of sufficient soldiers despite the Qing's assembling of many troops from different parts of China and Tibet, which, however, could often not reach in time the battlefields.<sup>182</sup> According to

171 Haenisch 1959, 35—AM's translation. For the Manchu version see Haenisch 1959, 20–21. For the Chinese version see BLBJL, vol. 15.

172 CPC VIII, 977.

173 Diskalkar 1933, 360.

174 Theobald 2020, 118; BLBJL, vol. 1.

175 CPC VIII, 399.

176 Place names are given on the spelling of their territorial origin with variants in brackets; See App. A.

177 Chen and Gao 2014, 89. It was exaggerated as 6,000–7,000 or even 10,000 in Kinglin's report (BLBJL, vol. 3).

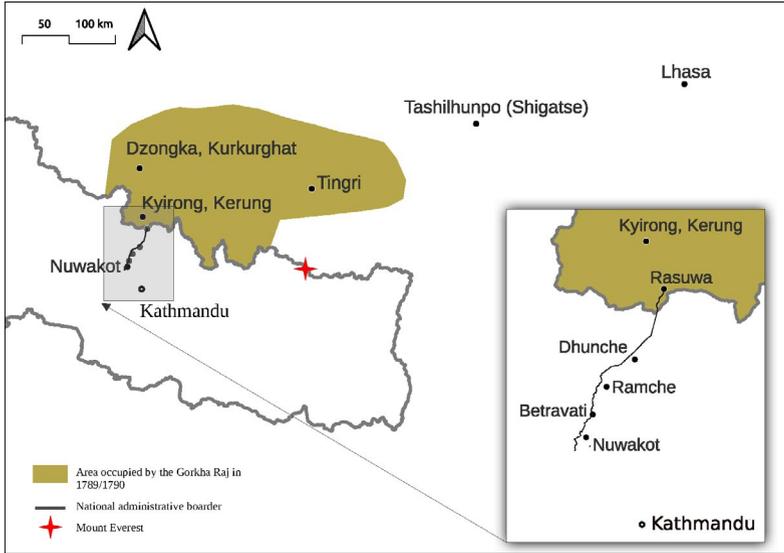
178 Regmi 1975, 432.

179 Sungyūn noted when he scrolled around the Tibetan territory, "I recall the invasion route of the Gorkha in 1788 (QL Wu-shen). They took two routes. One was from Kyirong, Dzonga, Bo-rong-ba, Mt. Yang-a-la, the main route at Tingri towards Shelkar. The other was from Nyalam, Mt. Tong-la, and Tingri, joining with the other at Shelkar" 復憶及乾隆戊申年廓爾喀入寇, 本系兩路, 一由濟隴、宗略、波絨巴、洋阿拉山、定日大路至協噶爾; 一由聶拉木、通拉山、定日會於協噶爾 (Wu 1985, 132). Cp. Satō 1986; Lai 1984.

180 A place on the way to Shigatse.

181 Report of VS 1850, 3; BLBJL, vol. 3, QL 53/8/22.

182 For details see Theobald 2020, 119–21.



Map 1: The areas of the Gorkha-Tibet and Sino-Nepalese Wars (drawing by Elias Michaels, 2025). Yellow area: occupied by the Gorkha army in 1789–1790; enlarged part: the battlefields during the Sino-Nepalese War 1791–1792 in Nepal

Kinglin who memorialised the report from the Tibetan ministers, the Gorkhali retreated on 14 September 1788 (QL 53/8/15).<sup>183</sup>

While the Tibetan troops were fighting the Gorkhali, the Tashi (Teshu or Panchen) Lama<sup>184</sup> despatched some lamas from the Tashilhunpo Monastery, together with other lamas from Sakya Monastery to the Gorkhali side to ask for peace negotiations.<sup>185</sup>

It appears that Tibet first did not ask for assistance from China in these negotiations to prevent a conflict that could endanger its autonomy. Concurrently, the Dalai Lama sought the intervention of the *rāja* of Jumla, albeit unsuccessfully.<sup>186</sup> Additionally, in a letter mentioned

183 BLBJL, vol. 7, QL 53/9/19. See also TP 563, 567.

184 The name Tashi was drawn from the place of residence. The Panchen Lama resided in the Tashilhunpo (Tib. bKra shis lhun po) Monastery. By then, the newly selected seventh Panchen Lama was very young. It was probably the brother of the previous Panchen Lama, i.e., Drungpa Hutuktu who acted in his name. Another probability was that the father of the seventh Panchen Lama (dPal ldan Don 'grub) acted in his name (TP 590, 10–14).

185 In the Report of VS 1850, 3<sup>r</sup>, it is the Gorkha Mahārāja who proposes negotiations which, however, were rejected, cp. Cammans 1961, 110–11 and the Tibetan perspective below.

186 In the Report of VS 1850, 3<sup>r</sup>.

above, the Panchen Lama appealed to Governor-General Charles Cornwallis in Kolkata for military aid, which was tactfully declined on the grounds that the distance between Kolkata and Lhasa is very large, that the Company has always held back towards Gorkha and that the Emperor should not be provoked because of a dispute between Tibet and Gorkha.<sup>187</sup> The Panchen Lama also urged the Governor not to disclose the request, fearing it could provoke the Chinese Emperor if the East India Company intervened to repel the Gorkha threat without involving China. This letter underscores Tibet's desperation and fear of Gorkha aggression.<sup>188</sup>

Bahadur Shah agreed on (or set) the condition that the Tibetans send Minister (Nep. *kājī*, Tib. *bka' blon*)<sup>189</sup> Doring Tenzin Peljor (rDo ring bsTan 'dzin dPal 'byor, 1760–c. 1811) and other “respected men” to Kerung (Kyirong) to the negotiate. Tenzin Peljor had become cabinet minister (*kalon* Tib. *bka' blon*) in 1783 at the age of 23.<sup>190</sup> His career reached its peak when he was appointed as the negotiator for the peace treaty with the invading Gorkha armies in 1788.

Meanwhile, the Emperor sent his imperial guard Bajung (also Pa-chung, Ba-zhong 巴忠) as the special commissioner, who served in the *Lifanyuan* and spoke Tibetan, to Lhasa, together with the General (titled Chin. *jiang-jun* 將軍 / Nep. *cāncun* / Tib. *lcang jun*) Ohūi and the Admiral (titled Chin. *ti-du* 提督 / Tib. *thi'i thu*) Cengde and many soldiers from Sichuan.<sup>191</sup>

187 Diskalkar 1933, n. 6. The Gorkhali had foreseen such a step because already on August 6, 1788, Rana Bahadur Shah had asked the Governor-General not to support the Tibetans after his invasion into Tibet.

188 Cp. Cammann 1951, 116.

189 For the position of cabinet minister, see Komatsubara 2010b.

190 The following is based on Erhard 2020a.

191 However, according to Tenzin Peljor's colleague g.Yu-thog, Bajung did not speak Tibetan to the ministers of Tibet (KRKD QL 57/10–11, 227). Meanwhile, the Chinese military chiefs could not communicate well with the Tibetan government as they could not speak Mongolian or Tibetan (TP 579.10–14). Zhang Zhi-yuan grew up in Dartsemdo and could speak Tibetan (TP 579.14–16) but an edict cited in his biography mentioned his weakness in writing Chinese characters. Therefore, the communication was obstructed by language and script barriers. (《國史大臣列傳正編卷173 至 174》, 清國史館本, 〈卷 173 至 174: (1)許世亨, (2)尚維昇, (3)張朝龍, (4)李化龍, (5)圖欽保, (6)張芝元, (7)彭廷棟, (8)貴林, (9)邁拉遜, (10)范時紀, (11)綽克托, (12)杜玉林, (13)穆精阿, (14)...〉, 故傳 005839 號, 件 6, 國立故宮博物院 清代檔案檢索系統, 30.) The edict cited was the same as “Grand Council edict to Zhang Zhi-yuan” on 30 August 1788 BLBJL, vol. 1, QL 53/7/29, while the version in BLBJL was largely censored).

While they were on their way, the Dalai Lama and the lamas from Tashilhunpo informed Bajung about the negotiations. The Tibetan lamas consented to these negotiations leading to the withdrawal of the Gorkhali army from Kerung (Kyirong) and Kuti (Nyalam), Dzongka and Phalavan (or Rongshar instead).<sup>192</sup> When the basic principles of treaty had been completed,<sup>193</sup> Bajung thus despatched two military officers, Mukdengga and Zhang Zhi-yuan (Tib. Mu Krang am ban) to be present at the Kyirong meeting,<sup>194</sup> but concealed these negotiations from the Emperor and hid himself behind Ohūi and the two officers.<sup>195</sup>

According to Dh. Vajrācārya and J. Nepāla (1970), the Tibetan leaders (namely the Sakya Trülku, Sakya Trizin) and the Tsongkhapa Trülku (i.e., the Dalai Lama) wanted to make a treaty (*sandhi*) or “unofficial peace agreement’ (Chin. *si-xia jiao-yi* 私下交易) with the Gorkhas by ‘paying them off to vacate the territory [occupied by the Gorkhas]’ (Chin. *xu yin shu di* 許銀贖地).<sup>196</sup> In August 1788, they wrote to the Gorkha government offering the peace arrangement (*ghā garnu*) as it is clear from the letter of King Rana Bahadur Shah dated 30 August 1792 deputing the leading *kājī* Damodara Pande to negotiate with the Chinese (see Part II, 2.1.2):

The Chinese Emperor is not a small, but a great Emperor. By the grace of the venerable goddess, we could have completely driven out the [Chinese] this time [at Nuvakot], but it did not seem to us appropriate to create a permanent conflict with the Emperor (lit. to damage the realm [*dhuṅgo*] of the Emperor). Therefore, he too intended to make a [peace] arrangement or negotiation (*ghā*<sup>197</sup>) with us, and we also intended to make [such

192 TP 648, 1–2 *gnyā' nang | rong shar | rdzong dga' | skyid grong* [...].

193 TP 638–40.

194 TP 642–43.

195 BLBJL has a gap of memorials from the frontier when the negotiation was made between May and July (vols. 19–21, QL 54/5–intercalary5).

196 Theobald 2020, 121. The redemption of territory was much of a disgrace which revealed the incapability of military conquest, while private transaction was still acceptable. Annual payments for peace were made by the Song court to the Tangut, Khitan, and Jurchen rulers in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, which was a national shame.

197 This is glossed *sandhi* by Vajrācārya and Nepāla 1957, 57 understanding it as a formal treaty. It was called “The proof with seals between the headpersons in charge of the pacification of border and those of Balbu, which says the two sides should remain in peace and ask for the Great Emperor through the amban residing in Lhasa upon occasion” 唐古特定邊頭目與巴勒布定邊頭

a] treaty. Ṭum̐thyān (Fuk’anggan) has also written ‘send one of the four Kājīs to China with a letter and presents etc. (*sara-sau-gāta*) in order to pay a *darśana* to (i.e., to visit) the Emperor’. In the past, our Kājīs also used to go to Tanahu and Lamjung to conclude the treaties (*ghā garnu*) there. We realised that it is not enough not to have sent a Kājī this time (*āja*) to the Emperor. We thought that the senior most *kājī*, Dāmōdara Pāḍe, who has received *birtā* land grants, may go.

While on 24 March 1789 (QL 54/2/28) the Qing troops reached the old border of Gorkha,<sup>198</sup> peace talks took place in Kerung in June 1789—apparently, in a tent, because the city was largely destroyed by the Gorkhalis. Appropriately, there was a precisely defined seating arrangement. According to the Report of VS 1890 (3<sup>v</sup>) and the Chinese report in 1792 (translated in Komatsubara 2017), the participants of the negotiation is given in Table 1.

During the negotiations and when the major force of the Chinese troops was at Shelkar, the Gorkhalis demanded compensation for the losses incurred due to currency imbalances and roadblocks. However, since the Tibetan government rejected these demands, the Gorkha delegation sought the mediation of the lamas of Tashilhunpo, as well as of the Shamarpa Lama. All three concluded that Lhasa (i.e., the Tibetan side) bore some responsibility,<sup>199</sup> which the Tibetans partially acknowledged, arguing, however, that they could not fully compensate. Upon hearing this, the Gorkhalis demanded either a one-time payment of 5,000,000 rupees<sup>200</sup> or the cession of territory south of the (Maha)

目為嗣後雙方相互和好有事經駐藏大臣奏請聖訓印結 和 “*The Proof with Seals on Permanent Friendship*” 永結和好印結 in the Chinese catalogue (Cata. Mnc. no. 7820–21 = 3–2–3271–005 Tib. no. 13147 = 3–2–3410–5, no. 13181–84 = 3–2–3410–4/7, 3–2–3411–14/16). The Tibetan name for the treaty was *Bod Gor-dkar tsho ‘grig pa’i ‘Chings Khra* (“*The verdict of the Binding Friendship Between the [two] Sides, Tibet and Gorkha,*” DL8, 291), *Bod Gor mThun-grub-kyi Yig-dan* (*The Document to achieve harmony between Tibet and Gorkha,*” TP; see Part II, 2.3.2b), or *Chings Khra-ma* (TP *passim*).

198 Theobald 2020, 121.

199 Following the Report of VS 1850 (3<sup>r</sup>), two Chinese *ambans* [sent by Bajung] to Kerung supported this view.

200 Chinese sources and TP both speak of three hundred Tibetan ingots of silver, which probably equals “fifteen thousand Indian silver coins (rupees).” (Komatsubara 2017, 184 n. 8). Many other Tibetan officials in Tibet also gave the same amount of payment, reported by Fuk’anggan’s memorial received on 20 February and 20 March 1792 (KRKJL, vol. 18, QL 57/1/20, vol. 20, QL 57/2/28). The confession of Tenzin Peljor on 3 January 1793 also gave the

Table 1: Seat order during the negotiations of the Treaty of Kerung (1789)

Witnesses: Hindu and Buddhist deities (including the Chinese Emperor) <sup>i</sup> Chödrup Gyatsho (Tib. Chos grub rgya mtsho, i.e., Shamarpa Lama) as mediator	
Representatives of Tashilhunpo Monastery	9–10 monks of Sakya Monastery
Envoys of the Gorkha King: Sāmarpā Lāmā, Minister ( <i>kāji</i> ) Dāmodara Pāḍe, Captain Bom Bahādura Śāha, treasurer Harihara Upādhyāya, Narasiṃh Sāhi et al.	Tibetan Government Envoys: Minister Doring Tenzin Peljor, Minister g.Yu thog (Itu) bKra shis don 'grub, <sup>ii</sup> Treasurer (rTsis dpon / Cin) bDe sbug pa (Devuka),  Qing Military officer: Mukdenggga and Zhang Zhi-yuan (Mu Krang am ban) et al., e.g., soldiers such as Yan Ting-liang (Nyan bTsong ye)
500 members (TP 628–29)	50 members (TP 628–29, 641–42)

i Among them Buddha, Mahākāla, Śiva, Brahmā, Umā Devī, Nārāyaṇa; interestingly, the Qing Emperor is also listed as a deity (“the master of the secular law”, Rājadharmesvara 王法之主) but not the Gorkali King who was believed to be an incarnation of Viṣṇu. See Komatsubara 2017, 188 for details. According to TP, the Heavenly Emperor (*gnam bskos 'jam dbyangs gong ma chen po*) was the judge (*khriṃ bdag*) upon the agreement of Tibet and Gorkha (TP 643, 11–13).

ii Not mentioned in the Report of VS 1850.

Langur, i.e., Khumbu Himal, or an annual payment of 100,000 rupees. The Tibetans did not agree to this proposal.

According to the Report of VS 1850, a truce or “religious agreement” (*dharmapatra*), was signed at the conclusion of the negotiations, with copies produced in both Tibetan and Gorkhali. Later, during the Sino-Nepalese War, the Manchu Great General Fuk’anggan ordered the copies held by Gorkha to be sent out and compared with the Tibetan version. Therefore, there also existed a later Chinese translation of it for the Emperor’s reference.

same story (KRKD QL 57/10–11, 200–17). However, in the letter from the Gorkha court to Bootai, the amban residing in Lhasa, it says it was 50,000 coins annually, which was calculated by Fuk’anggan as the equivalent of 300 ingots that is 15,000 *liang* (KRKJL, vol. 23 QL 57/3/9). It would be the equivalent to 9,600 taels of Chinese silver, Bengal, = 57,600 rupees, see Rose 1971, 42 and Theobald 2020, 12. Also, refer to the document *Keruisandhisandhi Patra Gorkhābhārālāi-Samvat 1843 Bhādra Mā* (see Part II, 2.1.2), where the amount is verified.

- a) Chinese Version: Tenzin Peljor noted that they failed to produce a Chinese translation *in situ* in Kyirong in 1789 due to the lack of a literary translator. It was only interpreted by Don 'grub, the translator (*thung si*)<sup>201</sup> Therefore, the existing Chinese Version was a later translation from 1792. In 2017, the Japanese scholar Yuri Komatsubara found a Chinese version of the document in the First Historical Archive in Peking of Grand Council, under *Han-wen lu-fu*.<sup>202</sup> She edited and translated the treaty, segmented it into 12 parts. This is the most detailed version. It begins with 1) invocation of deities and the Emperor and then regulates<sup>203</sup> 2) the reparations, 3) annual payment of 50,001 silver Indian coins, 4) the conversion rate (coins should not be mixed with copper and the new coin should be converted into one and a half old coins), 5) monopolisation of trade route, 6) border issue and taxes, for instance, on salt, butter, etc.; the ownership of land, especially of Mustang and Khumbu area; and further arrangements regarding the relationship between Tibet and Nepal, e.g., 7) the welcoming of Dalai Lama's bi-annual white-washing of the *stūpas* in Kathmandu, 8) the restoration of the business of Newari merchants in Lhasa and Shigatse, 9) the release of abducted Tibetan military officer, 10) the avoidance of weapon and 11) the usual reassurance of mutual friendship between Tibet and the Gorkha, penalties for violating the treaty, and 12) the names and seals of the signatories and attendees at the time the treaty was concluded.
- b) Tibetan version: According to TP, four copies and translations of the treaty were made: two each in Tibetan and Nepali.<sup>204</sup> Unfortunately, the bilingual Gorkhali-Tibetan copy, though listed in the catalogue of the First Historical Archive in Peking, has not yet been researched.<sup>205</sup>
- c) Nepālī Version, dated Vaiśākha sudi 2 (11 April 1790): The original version has also not yet been found in the Nepalese

201 TP 643–44.

202 *Hanwen Lufu* 3–157–7634–51, QL 57/7/4. The treaty was officially registered in the archives of Peking much later than its original date of signing, as Rose argued that the amban, Tibetans, and Nepalese collaboratively kept the treaty from the Emperor in 1789–1790 (1971, 44).

203 In the following, we summarise Komatsubara 2017.

204 TP 640 and *Hanwen Lufu* 3–157–7634–50, quoted in Komatsubara 2017, 182.

205 Cata. Tib. no. 13183, 13184 = 3–2–3411–16.

archives, but in the Pekingese archive.<sup>206</sup> Yogi Naraharinath edited a document—called *Gorkha ra Bhoṭako Mudrā Sandhi* (VS 1847)<sup>207</sup>—that comprises the following points:

- The exchange rate between the Gorkhali and the Tibetan *mahendramallī* was fixed at two to one.<sup>208</sup>
- Gorkha continues to mint the coins for Tibet.
- The withdraw from Tibetan territory, from “the three border strongholds Nilam (Nyalam), Jongka (Jhunga) and Kirung (Kerung).”<sup>209</sup>
- It is not allowed to change this agreement.

This part was signed by Dunara Sela Huna Thona Ḍupa Phunachopa [rTse drung Don ‘grub Phun tsogs from Potala], Dhurina Kājī [Tenzin Peljor], representative Purdun [sPor gdung pa], the “Great Lama’s” representative Arjavegi, Esethacyan [Ye shes rgyal mtshan]

- Tibet will pay a sum of 50,001 rupees to the Gorkha King.
- The agreement was witnessed and signed by Bom [Bam] Bahadur Shah, Harihara Upadhyaya, Syama Lal Pande, Tenzin Peljor, Shamarpa Lama, Devuka, and other signatories.

Considering the amalgamation of data from these sources, it seems that because of the Gorkha-Tibet conflict, Gorkha retreated and ceded authority over the area from Kerung to Kuti and further north to Jhunga [Dzongka] and Shikarajang [Shelkar], while Tibet was compelled to pay homage to Nepal, including an annual tribute of 50,001 rupees.

### 3.1 The Nepalese Perspective

The Report of VS 1850 (2.1.5) aligns with the events described in the previous section in greater detail. The events can be summarised as follows:

206 Ibid.

207 Naraharinātha 1965, 20; see also PART II, 2.1.5; cp. Stiller 1975, 197–98.

208 Zhou Ai-lian (1804/1913, vol. 4, 21) reported the same rate requested by the Gorkhals, while the official Chinese understanding of the treaty as one for one and a half.

209 Cammann 1951, 119. Geographically speaking, it is more likely to be Rongshar, Nyalam, and Kyirong, which is also verified by Tenzin Peljor (TP 648).

In 1788, the Gorkhali army engaged in a month-long war in Tibet, reaching Shelkar but facing challenging terrain. Despite Tibetan reinforcements, the Gorkha King's army emerged victorious. Subsequently, the lamas proposed peace, leading to negotiations. The Gorkha King's army withdrew, and representatives from both sides met in Kerung. Negotiations included compensation discussions, with the Gorkha King seeking rupee compensation for expenses and losses due to closed Tibetan roads. Despite agreements by the Tibetans, disagreements arose over the amount of compensation. Mediation by the lamas determined Lhasa's fault, but the delegation hesitated to compensate fully. The Gorkha king proposed various solutions, including rupee compensation, restoring the old border, or ceding new territories, but the Lhasa delegation did not agree to any proposals.

Following the conclusion of negotiations, the army chief (*cang-cun*)<sup>210</sup> sent ambans Mutajin and Tanga Tajin to Kerung (Mukdengga and Zhang Zhi-yuan). After thorough discussions, the ambans determined Lhasa's fault and persuaded them to agree to pay 50,000 (*sic!*) rupees annually to the Gorkha King. A religiously solemnised agreement (*dharmapatra*) was issued, and the ambans facilitated peaceful terms between the two sides. The Lhasa representatives deposited the first year's payment in the Gorkha King's treasury. The Gorkha King relinquished control of Kerung, Kutu, Jhuṅgā (Dzongka), and Phalak (Phalavan, Phula). A junior amban returned to Nepāla with the *dharmapatra* paper.

After the negotiations in Kerung, Bahadur Shah sent a delegation led by the "subordinate amban" [Yan Ting-liang]<sup>211</sup> together with an *arjī*, presents (*najara*, *tohaphā*) and the vakils Harihara Upadhyaya and Balabhadra Khavasa as well as 20–25 other people to Beijing which they reached after 6 months and where they stayed 45 days receiving fifteen audiences by the Emperor.<sup>212</sup> After fourteen months, they returned with ceremonial robes and credentials of a title for both the king and his regent to Kathmandu.

210 Ohūi was holding the title of General by then. In fact, it might have been Bajung who made the decision. However, Bajung hid himself behind everyone without revealing his name or title to the Gorkhalis (KRKJL, vol. 43, QL 57/10/21).

211 Cp. Mosca 2013, 138.

212 Report of VS 1850, 4<sup>v</sup>.

### 3.2 The Tibetan Perspective

According to Tibetan sources,<sup>213</sup> in the spring of 1788, the Kashag (cabinet, Tib. *bka'shag*) warned all border stations that the Gorkhalis were about to invade the country. In the sixth month of 1788, 5,000 Gorkhali troops and 3,000 porters, led by a servant (*g.yog*) of the Shamarpa named Karma mTshog sbyin (Chin. Gar-ma Tuo-jue 噶爾瑪妥覺), indeed reached Nyalam, Rongshar, and Kyirong. Lhasa sent relief troops with two generals (*mda' dpon* Pad tsal Chin. Ba-zai 巴載 and *mda' dpon* lCang lo can Chin. Jiang-jie 將結)<sup>214</sup> to stop the invasion. The ambans residing in Lhasa, Kinglin and Yamantai, memorialised the invasion to the Emperor, whereupon the Emperor sent his imperial guard, Pa-chung (Bajung), who spoke Tibetan, along with troops led by Cengde to Lhasa. While they were on their way, the Gorkhalis retreated from Shelkar (Shikarajang) and Saga (near Dzongka).

The Tibetans were shocked by the invasion of the Gorkhalis who vandalised everything including statues, manuscripts, stupas, and paintings. They were the enemies of the Buddhist teaching (*bstan dgra*).<sup>215</sup> In the hagiography of Men Gompa Künga Penden (sMan bsgom pa Kun dga' dpal ldan), the “physician” of the tenth Shamarpa Lama, the brutality of the invasion is depicted with vivid detail:

[At the age of] fifty-three years, in the earth-male monkey year [called] *kīlaka* [= 1788], the great army of the Gorkhas like asuras in their fury, with the power of wrong prayers, got ready and proceeded to the realm of Tibet, the region of the north. They made many beings experience severe, inexhaustible suffering. Many local hermitages [and] monasteries, [together with] viharas, where the [wheel of the] Dharma had been turned, were destroyed, and so on. From then on began what became like a summer flood of the change of times and what is known up to now as the ‘Crisis of the Earth Monkey [Year].’<sup>216</sup>

213 Our following account is primarily based on the biography Tenzin Peljor (TP 561f), used by Shakabpa (1967, 158–67) and Li (2002).

214 TP 561–62. The former was sent to Peking for his failure of defense (TP 656.8f; BLBJL, vol. 21, QL 53/6/20), while the later was abducted to the Kathmandu Valley and died of illness in 1791 (TP 828).

215 TP 577.

216 Ehrhard 2007, 125.

The autobiography of Rindzin Chöying Dorjé (Rig 'dzin Chos dbyings rDo rje, 1772–1838) also stresses the gruesome brutality of the Gorkhalis:

In his writing, he compared the battlefield to the frightening land of the *rākṣasa* in Lanka. These figures, who originate from Indian mythology, are demons said to drink blood and eat human flesh. He added that everybody in the camp, Buddhists and non-Buddhists, were frightened by 'garlands of flesh and skin' that could be seen everywhere. This probably refers to body parts and remains that could be seen strewn about, a consequence of the war and its violent actions.<sup>217</sup>

Clearly, there was a disagreement between China and Tibet on the question of China's involvement in military conflicts. An old lama in charge of the storehouse of Tashilhunpo named rNam rgyal (*bKra shis lhunp po'i gnyer tsang rnying pa bla ma rNam rgyal*) sent a letter to his old friend of Shamarpa, saying that the Chinese army (*rgya dmag*) would be a great disturbance to all the three, China, Tibet and Nepal (*rgya bod bal gsum tshang mar*).<sup>218</sup>

While Cengde (Tib. Khrin Thi'i thu) with 2,000 troops was on his way to Lhasa, the Gorkhalis retreated from Shelkar and Saga. By the time, the amban Kinglin, probably influenced by the Tibetan government, tried to inform the troops to stop marching, constantly telling them that the Gorkhalis had retreated and the Sakya Hutuktu sent people to make peace in September and October.<sup>219</sup> Tenzin Peljor remarked that Cengde was rather enthusiastic in marching forward quickly.<sup>220</sup> A short time later, the vanguard of the Chinese army led by Cengde reached Lhasa. Tenzin Peljor accompanied the Chinese troops to Tashilhunpo, from where Cengde's further march was obstructed for various reasons. Shakabpa interpreted his biography as:

All arrangements had been made at Shigatse for the speedy advance of the army. Fresh horse, and rations were on hand. Still, Shen T'ai-tu [Cengde, who held the title Ti-du] spent five days at Shigatse, making a number of petty excuses for delaying the

217 Erschbamer 2018, 135.

218 TP 591, 9–18.

219 BLBJL, vol. 7, QL 53/9/16; vol. 10, QL 53/10/7.

220 See also TP 567, 569.

advance. After holding a number of meetings with his officers [Zhang Zhi-yuan and other rGyal-rong officers], Shen [Cengde] told me that if we advanced without waiting for the main body of the imperial army to catch up, we would be inviting defeat and disgrace. If we remain at Shigatse until the main army joined us, our total number would be too great for the resources of the town. He then asked me if I had a solution to the problem. I received the impression that the officer wanted to avoid a fight. I gave my opinion that the Tibetan troops were doing well, and since the Chinese troops looked even more capable, we were certain to defeat the Gurkhas if we advanced. If we attacked and drove the Gurkhas out now, then we would be in a stronger bargaining position when the rest of the imperial troops did arrive. Then, if the Gurkhas did not comply with our demands, we could march into Nepal. Shen T'ai-tu [Cengde] then openly asked me if there was no way in which we could negotiate with the Gurkhas and suggested that I write to the Dalai Lama about it. I told him that I would not pass my responsibilities on to the Dalai Lama. We had been sent to Shigatse to fight, and fight we must!<sup>221</sup>

While they were waiting for more imperial troops to join, winter had set in so that the Chinese troops finally stayed in Shelkar for eight months.<sup>222</sup> In the spring of 1789, the Tibetans contacted Chödrup Gyatsho, the tenth Shamarpa (see below, Part I, 4), in Nepal who suggested that the parties meet in Kyirong for negotiations. Bajung, the special commissioner, must have been in favour of it as well. In the end, the Tibetan and Chinese

221 Shakabpa 1967, 159 = TP 567–73. The strong exclamation at last cannot be found in the published edition. It might be from the other recension held by Shakabpa (van der Kuijp and Tien 2022, 9 n. 12). In the edition, Tenzin Peljor expressed the urgency and futility of reporting back and forth, requesting the army to march forward. He also mentioned that the Tibetan local officers were bullied by the Chinese troops in the name of their failure to prepare for service, while the Chinese troops waited further. Interestingly, Cengde was commemorated as who insisted on fighting at first after the campaigns ended (KRKJL, *Poems by the Emperor*, part 3). The Emperor wrote a poem to commemorate his merit that begins with, “He argued with Bajung, which reveals his ambition [in fighting]” 曾爭巴忠, 尚有雄心.

222 They probably did not transport provisions from Sichuan but relied on local supply, as the Emperor did order that the Tibetan government should supply the provisions late to be paid according to their value by the Chinese (BLBJL, vol. 4, QL 53/8/23).

delegations made their way to Kyirong, where they arrived five days before the Gorkhalis.

Tenzin Peljor, accompanied by representatives from two Tibetan monasteries, Sakya and Tashilhunpo, met with Gorkha officials in Kyirong. The Gorkhalis, led by Bam Bahadur Shah, cited three main reasons for their occupation of Tibet: they blamed the Tibetans for the death of their king (Prithvi Narayan, Tib. *Pi ti ña ran*), believing the king had been cursed, as the Tibetans supported Sikkim against Gorkha; they accused the Tibetans of neglecting to resolve issues related to currency exchange between old and new coins; and they expressed concerns over Tibetan military preparations in the Back of Tibet, which they saw as a potential threat to their own country. The Gorkhalis demanded an annual payment of 300 *rdo tshad*<sup>223</sup> (equivalent to 9,600 *taels* of silver)<sup>224</sup> and proposed tithing on gold mining and salt import, while also insisting on exempting Nepalese merchants in the occupied regions from taxation.

During the negotiations, Tenzin Peljor described Shamarpa Lama as “very proud and pleased with himself.”<sup>225</sup> Shakabpa summarises Tenzin Peljor’s account of the result of the negotiations as follows:

We agreed to devalue all impure Nepalese coins being used in Tibet. The old coins, which had no impurities, would have the same value as the new coins being minted in Nepal. It was agreed that Tibetan salt would contain no impurities and that the border inspectors would strictly enforce this rule. Rice and salt must be valued at the current market price, to which of course there is no limitation. Any Nepalese rice trader having to stay in Tibet at an inn must be given free accommodation and firewood; but ten per cent of his sales from rice will have to be given the innkeeper. Tibetan merchants are not permitted to enter Nepal for any purpose of trade or exchange. If a Nepalese subject commits any crime in Tibetan territory, he will be tried and punished by the Nepalese representative in that area. Tibetan officials will have no jurisdiction in the case. To recover the four districts captured by the Gurkhas, Tibet must pay Nepal an annual tribute

223 TP 648, 1.

224 Li 2002, 144.

225 Shakabpa 1967, 161. See also TP 642.17–643.9: Shamarpa could speak Gorkhali, Chinese, and Tibetan. He was compared to Devadatta (Lha sbyin), the cousin of the Buddha.

of 300 *dotsed* [*rdo tshad*]. The Nepalese agreed to withdraw their troops immediately on receipt of the first year's tribute.

Addendum: Three hundred *dotsed* have to be paid the first year; but if a senior and responsible Tibetan official visits Nepal in the next year and requests a reduction in the amount of tribute, the Nepalese agree to take it under consideration.<sup>226</sup>

This agreement,<sup>227</sup> together with the addendum, was signed and sealed in two copies by the delegations with Shamarpa as a witness. At the same time, the Tibetans wanted to include China as an arbitrator. Zhang Zhi-yuan and Mukdengga refused to officially stamp the agreement because there was no tradition to do so for the addenda in China. Their proposal to draft the agreement in Chinese was rejected by the Tibetans due to the lack of a literate translator but only an interpreter (Tib. *thung si*, Chin. *tong-shi* 通事).<sup>228</sup> So it happened that the written addendum was not approved by the Chinese side<sup>229</sup> and they were therefore not guilty of signing such a humiliating private contract during the following Sino-Nepalese War. Tenzin Peljor complained in his recollection that the Chinese officers in fact removed their own seals on the treaty before giving them to the Emperor after the Sino-Nepalese War, as narrated by Shakabpa:

Kalon Doring states in his memoirs that the Chinese were so ashamed of their conduct that they took the original treaty away with them and removed the portion bearing their own seals before showing it to the Manchu Emperor. In a letter he wrote to the father of the Dalai Lama, Kalon Doring said that there was little difference between the Gurkhas and the Chinese. The former looted and killed because they came as enemies; but the Chinese did the same thing, and they came as friends. Owing to the misconduct of his subordinate officers and failure in his responsibilities, Pachung [Bajung], the Manchu [in fact,

226 Shakabpa 1967, 161; see also TP 635–40.

227 The following summarises Li 2002, 144–50.

228 TP 643–45. The Chinese stamps were indeed not mentioned in the later Chinese translation of this treaty (Komatsubara 2017, 195).

229 According to Deng 2009, the Emperor in fact considered the Dalai Lama to be fully responsible for the 1789 treaty.

a Mongolian bannerman] aide-de-camp [i.e., special commissioner 欽差], committed suicide after his return to China.<sup>230</sup>

In the end, the Chinese officials further demanded that the Gorkhalis be liable to congratulate the Emperor with an envoy (*gnang chags kyi mtshams zhu'i mi sna*) annually from now on.<sup>231</sup> Yan Ting-liang (Tib. Nyan bTsong ye), a minor military officer of the Green Standard army, was thus sent to Kathmandu for it. The imperial commissioner, Bajung saw the result as a great success and memorialised his victory in pacifying the conflict to the court but concealed the true agreement. Bajung was celebrated and highly decorated for the military success of the Gorkhali retreat.

As arranged in Kyirong, the Gorkhalis were preparing for their first tributary mission. Shakabpa describes these events by summarising the biography of Tenzin Peljor:

The main body of the imperial army returned, while one general with a few troops waited at She[l]kar to escort the Nepalese envoy to China. A month later two Gurkhas, Hari Sahib [Upadhyaya] and Bala Bahadur [i.e., Balbhadra Khavas], arrived with ten assistants bringing presents for the Emperor. They accompanied the general back to China. The Tibetans also sent an envoy.<sup>232</sup>

Shakabpa further commented: “It is clear from Tibetan sources that the Chinese army was more of a hindrance than a help to Tibet in the [first] war with Nepal”. However, unlike Shakabpa’s comment that the Tibetans were against the treaty, the eighth Dalai Lama was pleased by the agreement between Tibet and Gorkha, giving blessings to all

230 Shakabpa 1967, 161–62 = TP 646.

231 *de rjes rgya dpon gnyis nas gsung rigs su bod ljongs kyi skye rgu nams kyang | gong ma chen por 'go 'dren skyabs mgon bcol te [l] khrims bdag tu bkur grub pa yin gshis | 'di lo nas bzungs lo gnang chags kyi mtshams zhu'i mi sna gtong dgos zhes gsungs song bar |* “Then the two Chinese [military] officers said that the people of the Tibetan territory also entrust the Great Emperor as the patron-protector, venerating him as the judge. Hence, beginning from this year, it is said that one should send messenger of congratulations of presents” (TP 646.18–647.4). See also TP 958.3–4: *gor-kha'i mtshams zhus mi sna...*

232 Shakabpa 1967, 161–62; Cammann 1951, 122.

negotiators.<sup>233</sup> More essentially, some of the Tibetan representatives were sent from Potala. The uncle of Dalai Lama was in power by that time and sent a written instruction to urge Tenzin Peljor.<sup>234</sup> As we have seen in the previous chapters, the Potala representative was also present in Kyirong during negotiation. The eighth Dalai Lama got away with any blame later, because Fuk'anggan told the Emperor that Dalai was not aware of it.

Nevertheless, there was indeed opposition from the Tibetan side. The Tibetan Regent, Ngawang Tshülthrim was annoyed and criticised Tenzin Peljor seriously for allowing this to happen:

In the earth-monkey year (1788), the little barbarian country of the Gurkha even dared to invade our state of Buddhism. You, ministers and local chieftains, brought up by milk, are such a group of cowards. [Qing] generals [referring to Bajong (Ba-zhong), E'hui and Chengde] cheated the great Emperor and covered up the truth. You not only did not insist on declaring a war against the Gurkha, but, even signed the Tibeto-Gurkha peace treaty, turning such an important matter into trivia. Particularly you. Duke Bstan 'dzin dpal 'byor, bright and quick-minded at a young age, were at one time considered a reincarnated lama. I had a very high hope on you and had assumed that you would be up to serving the government just as well as the former minister Tshe ring dbang rgyal and your own father Pandita. But I was wrong. I cannot believe that you agreed to hand over such a large amount in payment to the Gurkha.<sup>235</sup>

Tibet was not be able to follow the treaty. It invoked the Addendum, which required new negotiations and sending envoys to Kathmandu. After all kinds of suspicious clarifications regarding the composition of the delegations, the location of the negotiations and status issues, they met at Chongdui in Nyalam (“Tshong ‘du in gNya’ nang”) in

233 [...] *zhva dmar mgron gnyer Ye shes rgyal mtshan mams nas Bod Gor dkar tsho 'grig pa'i 'chings khra spyen zhuis la | so sor go bab gyi gsol ras bskyangs |* “[Father of the seventh Panchen, Tenzin Peljor, ministers, officers from Saskya and Tashilhunpo...] and Ye shes rgyal mtshan, the attendant of Shamarpa etc., requested [Dalai’s] vision of the agreement between the parties, namely, Tibet and Gorkha. They were given gifts according to their ranks respectively.” (DL8, 291.17–19).

234 TP 637.10.

235 Li 2002, 134 = TP 724–25, cp. Deng 2007a and 2009.

1791.<sup>236</sup> Since the Gorkhalis suspected the Tibetan intention to kidnap Shamarpa, they captured the Tibetan delegation led by Tenzin Peljor and immediately invaded Tibet.

### 3.3 The Chinese Perspective

Unlike the Tibetan sources that contain details about peace negotiations and battles, the Chinese sources concerning the events in Tibet during 1788–1789 appear to be vague. Everyone had their own agenda in their memorialisations. The Tibetan ministers and the ambans might want to get less imperial involvement, while the military officers would like to get rewards and accumulate wealth. Bajung would like to please the Emperor as soon as possible so that he can go back home, as we see his rushing back after the peace treaty of Kyirong. Some of the memorials about the battlefronts were even contradictory. While the amban reported that the Gorkhalis ran away so as to ask for the cessation of mobilising troops, the military officers might have reported combats to request an award from the Emperor. Most of the memorials from the ambans conveyed the messages provided by the Tibetan ministers, whereas later memorials from Bajung concealed many incidents, fabricating acceptable stories for the Emperor. Therefore, we will focus on the courtly decision in this chapter, emphasising how the Emperor understood the event, while the memorialised frontier information will be given in the calendric summary (Table 2 in Part I, 5.4). It was only later in 1792 that the full story of negotiation was told to the Emperor after various investigations.

The Chinese Emperor reacted to the invasion quickly by dispatching Ohūi and Bajung from the summer capital. He immediately ordered Cengde to march from Sichuan as well.<sup>237</sup> He was extremely annoyed by Kinglin's reaction and punished him severely.<sup>238</sup> Nevertheless, he could not understand the complexity of the battlefront. Sometimes, the memorials appeared to be ambiguous and even disprove each other. For the worse, these unauthenticated reports were even delayed frequently so that the Emperor was wondering why Cengde failed to memorialise regularly at the beginning of the year 1789.<sup>239</sup> Eventually, he could only

236 Li 2002, 153.

237 BLBJL, vol. 1.

238 BLBJL, vol. 6, QL 53/9/11; vol. 15, QL 53/12/23; Haenisch 1959.

239 BLBJL, vol. 16, QL 54/1/3.

accept the excuse that the troop could not find a route through Mount Tong-la (Tib. mThong la) toward Nyalam and thus stayed stationed around Shelkar for months.

Regarding the negotiation, the Tibetan source by Tenzin Peljor makes it clear to us that Zhang Zhi-yuan (Figure 6) and Mukdengga were dispatched to Kyirong for the peace negotiation. However, Bajung reported that he sent the two officers to summon the Gorkha chiefs.<sup>240</sup> Zhang Zhi-yuan, a Chinese as he was, could not write Chinese well, while Mukdengga was a Manchu bannerman. They were also subordinate to Bajung. It was probably Bajung who polished his memorials, reporting the fake news that the Gorkhali chiefs did kowtow to Mukdengga and Zhang Zhi-yuan. Bajung continued to keep the Emperor busy with other Tibetan affairs.<sup>241</sup> The Emperor was indeed deceived by Bajung and accepted the so-called “surrender”.<sup>242</sup>

Moreover, Bajung and his delegation were familiar with the imperial system and knew that a tributary envoy upon the Emperor’s birthday would please him. So was it arranged. The Emperor indeed paid much more attention to the tributary envoy than the physical conquest. He curiously inquired whether there would be a group of musicians together with the envoy. He was approaching 80 years old (in 1790) and the 60<sup>th</sup> reigning year (in 1795), which he set as a goal as well as a limit. He was keenly preparing to celebrate and enhance the imperial and personal glory among his East and Central Asian vassals, as many envoys from subordinate or ritually subordinate states would come to have an audience with him. Playing the music of Gorkha at court would add a brilliant touch to his merits.

Probably because of Qianlong’s greater interest in his birthday party next year, despite various mistakes in Bajung’s memorials, he eventually forgave Bajung with only minor reproaches.<sup>243</sup> Being assured of no more punishment, Bajung rushed back to Sichuan and further toward Peking to his family, disregarding the edicts requesting him to meet Shamarpa.<sup>244</sup> The Emperor rejoiced and considered the “campaign” to be one of his achievements.

240 BLBJL, vol. 19, QL 54/5/2.

241 BLBJL, vol. 20, 22.

242 BLBJL, vol. 21, QL 54/6/2. The Emperor expressed his worries that the Tibetans were reporting hyperbolic fake news from the very beginning in his Edict to Kinglin (BLBJL, vol. 4, QL 53/8/23).

243 E.g. BLBJL, vol. 17, QL 54/2/22.

244 BLBJL, vol. 23, QL 54/6/20; vol. 24, QL 54/8/10; vol. 26, QL 54/9/27. Emperor Qianlong’s mentioning Bajung’s family also reveals their intimate relationship



Figure 6: The Chinese Military Officer Zhang Zhi-yuan (source: Wikimedia Commons)

It should be noted that simultaneously in 1789 the Qing troops faced difficulties in the Vietnamese War. Even though Sun Shi-yi was fully defeated by the Vietnamese, Fuk'anggan managed to negotiate with the Vietnamese ruler who bribed his retreat. The Vietnamese ruler eventually

between the master (Mnc. *ejen*) and his slaves (Mnc. *aha*) in the Manchurian culture (cp. Swen 2021, 7–9).

decided to present the tribute by “himself”.<sup>245</sup> Nevertheless, from the imperial perspective of the Qing Dynasty, it was a great success.

The result of the Gorkha-Tibet War is summarised by Wei Yüan (1794–1857) in the 1840s, 50 years after the first Gorkha-Tibet War. Despite some mistakes, his comments were quite precise.<sup>246</sup> Given the popularity of this text in both China and Japan, it reflects a later common understanding of the Chinese reaction between 1788 and as more of extravagance and disgrace than glory.

[Wei Yüan:] Gorkha found pretexts that the commercial taxes increased and that the Tibetan salt [sold to them] was mixed with clay. They thus mobilised troops and crossed the frontier. The Tibetan troops could not defend themselves. The imperial guard (Mnc. *hiya*), Bajung, was dispatched by the court to assist [Tibet] and annihilate [the enemy] along with Generals Ohüi and Cengde. They tried to bring an end to the event by bribing peace. They secretly ordered the Tibetan Khenpo (Tib. mKhan po) to privately promise an annual payment of 15,000 [in fact, 300] ingots while holding the army from battle. At that time, the Dalai Lama did not agree. However, Bajung polished his memorial, saying the enemy had surrendered. [Bajung and others] tactfully persuaded the Gorkha tribal chieftain to pay tribute and be conferred the title of [Erdeni] King. For this campaign, not even one weapon was involved in a battle, whereas provisions cost millions [of ingots].<sup>247</sup>

The Emperor understood the conflict between Gorkha and Tibet to be essentially based on commercial issues as well as the timidity and thriftiness of the Tibetan people so that the Gorkhalis were not initially defeated and marched forward.<sup>248</sup> He was worried about further conflicts and ordered Ohüi to improve the military power in Tibet.<sup>249</sup>

245 There are disputes whether he came in person or delegated a fake “king”. Da-nan, vol. 30, 31–37; Ngô-gia văn-phá chapter 15.

246 Quoted from Haenisch 1959, 9.

247 It was true that almost 1.5 million ingots of silver were raised for this “campaign”, while around 600,000–700,000 were used in the end (Lai 1984, 428, 430). See also 《宮中檔奏摺-乾隆朝》，李世傑 奏，〈奏為遵旨查明此次官兵赴藏至將來凱旋時撤回內地約計應用軍需銀兩分晰查明具覆（附件：附奏接奉上諭之摺片）〉，乾隆 53 年 10 月 27 日，故宮 081340 號，頁 1，國立故宮博物院 清代檔案檢索系統。

248 Potala inscription (Part II, 2.2.5 [2]).

249 Deng 2008; BLBJL, vol. 23.

These worries proved to be reasonable, as the Sino-Nepalese War soon happened. However, the Emperor was deeply influenced by the narration given by Bajung, despite Bajung's suicide in September 1791. He was rather confident that Bajung dared not to deceive him. Meanwhile, Bootai also memorialised that Tenzin Peljor went to Nyalam for the restoration of temples, a check on the border, and the discussion of debts with the Gorkhalis.<sup>250</sup> Thus, in 1791, the Emperor still thought that the Tibetans owed money to Gorkha in previous transactions. He once decided to pay the money for the Tibetans, using his own treasury to close the case. Meanwhile, as an emperor, he remained suspicious and ordered other ministers to do more investigations. Eventually, he found discrepancies in the reports and realised the existence of a peace treaty during the Gorkha-Tibetan conflict. In a later edict on the drought in 1793, he took this as a cautionary example, saying that he should have figured out the deceitfulness of Bajung and reacted earlier.<sup>251</sup>

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The events at the frontiers after the Kyirong agreement remain somewhat unclear. We do not know whether the Gorkhalis fully retreated from Rongshar, Kyirong, and Nyalam after signing the Kyirong Treaty. The most detailed account, provided by Leo Rose,<sup>252</sup> relies on Chinese sources and often overlaps with accounts of the Sino-Nepalese War. However, it is certain that in the autumn of 1789, Rana Bahadur Shah dispatched a delegation to the imperial court in Peking. This mission, led by the *vakila* Harihara Upadhyaya, Balabhadra Khavasa, and approximately twenty to twenty-five other officials, aligns with the details in the Report of VS 1850. The delegation brought customary ceremonial gifts such as Gorkhali swords and palm leaves-manuscripts,<sup>253</sup> embarking on a six-month journey. Having arrived at Peking before the full moon of the 12<sup>th</sup> lunar month of QL 54 (January 1790),<sup>254</sup> they were warmly received on 4 February 1790, the traditional beginning of

250 Yuan Yi Lai, no. 860; Deng 2009, 21. The versions preserved in WZTZ, vol. 131 and KRKJL, vol. 1 were intensively censored.

251 Deng 2009, 24. *Veritable Records QL*, vol. 1403, QL 57/intercalary 4/Bing-shen.

252 Rose 1971, 52–67.

253 BLBJL, *Poems by the Emperor*, vol. 26, Final Edict.

254 BLBJL, *Poems by the Emperor*.

spring. During their forty-five-day stay in Peking, they were granted fifteen audiences with the Emperor, often accompanied by envoys from other countries, and received various gifts and ceremonial robes. A translator, Ma Ting-xiang, was also rewarded for his service.<sup>255</sup> He later served as translator for Fuk'anggan and Yang Kui in 1792. Rana Bahadur was honoured with the Manchu-Chinese title *erdeni wang* (Chin. 額爾德尼王), meaning “Brilliant King” (literally “King of Treasure”, Sanskritised as *ratnarāja*), while Bahadur Shah received the title *kung* (Chin. 公 *gong*), signifying “Duke.” After fourteen months, the delegation returned to Kathmandu. The Emperor took great delight in the reception of the tributary envoy from such a distance.

To sum up, the sources agree that a meeting happened in Kyirong regarding the currency and trade problems, although earlier Chinese memorials concealed the nature of its being a peace negotiation and reported that the Gorkhalis did kowtow to the Chinese military chiefs.<sup>256</sup> Written documents about the agreement of Kyirong were made as proof, while their existence was deliberately kept from the Chinese Emperor. That this agreement was not to last long is part of the chapter after next. Before that, however, it is necessary to address the shady role of an intermediary in Kerung.

255 *Qianlong Veritable Records*, vol. 1346.

256 BLBJL, vol. 21, QL 54/6/2; Cata. Mnc. no. 7624 = 3–2–3408–029.