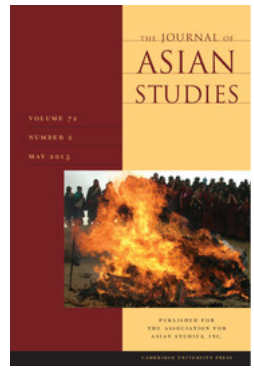

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Joseph D. Lawson

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Warlord Colonialism: State Fragmentation and Chinese Rule in Kham, 1911–1949

JOSEPH D. LAWSON

This article investigates Chinese warlord authority in the east of the Kham Tibetan region between 1911 and 1949. The colonial government established by the Qing Empire in Kham during the five years before the end of dynastic rule relied on central government funding. With the fragmentation of the Chinese state in the Republican period, Chinese regimes in Kham were forced to raise more revenue locally and reduce expenditure. Responding to these challenges shaped the nature of Chinese authority in Kham. The late Qing colonial government had paid Tibetans who provided livestock and labor for transport as part of the 'u-lag *corvée. Republican-era governors lacked the resources to do the same. They struggled to develop other ways of controlling the corvée, and attempted to create alternative state transport organizations. Changes in the sources of county government revenue also had important effects on Chinese officials' approach to what they considered to be "wasteland."*

Chinese military forces under the command of Liu Wenhui suppressed the Khampa Tibetan autonomy movements led by Kelzang Tsering (Skal bzang tshe ring) in 1932, and the Panchen Lama's field office in 1939 (Goldstein, Sherap, and Siebenschuh 2004, 13; Peng 2002, 72). In 1932, Liu attacked the Lhasa Tibetan army and prepared for an assault on Chamdo (Leibold 2007, 72). Within his area of control, he attempted to promote Chinese settlement and funded schools where Tibetan students studied a Chinese curriculum. In these regions, Liu's aspirations were as colonial as those of other twentieth-century Chinese governments in the Tibetan lands, though his authority was much more limited. But Liu was not acting on the instructions of the Nationalist central authorities: his regime was a largely autonomous military government. Liu and his army had official titles within the Chinese state structure and derived some financial support from the central government. Yet he ignored commands from nominal superiors when it suited him, including orders to desist from attacks against the Tibetan army in 1932 (Leibold 2007, 72). In return, agents of the central government outlined proposals for his removal, accusing his regime of being "hopelessly corrupt and totally lacking any concept of what is good for the nation" (Jiang 1949).

This article is about colonial rule in the context of the fragmentation of the colonial state. It shows how the effects of the disintegration of the Chinese state after 1911 meant that Liu Wenhui's regime in Kham adopted approaches to the region's environment and

Joseph D. Lawson (joe.david.lawson@gmail.com) is Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica.

people that were significantly different from those of the colonial government established in the last five years of the Qing dynasty. New taxes responded to the reduction of central support and resulted in the end of a Qing legal dichotomy between cultivated and uncultivated land. One of most pressing problems of colonial rule in Kham was the transport of soldiers, provisions, and munitions across a tough and sparsely populated landscape, and with limited central government support Liu was forced to elaborate on Qing solutions and pioneer new ones.

Starting in the 1880s and with increasing enthusiasm in the 1900s, the Qing government created new administrations in many of the empire's non-Han territories and protectorates, including Xinjiang, parts of Mongolia and Tibet, and large areas of the southwest, in order to integrate them with China (Adshead 1984; Ho 2008; Ma 2002; Millward 1998; Sperling 1976; Tighe 2005; X. Wang 2011). This involved the replacement of non-Han leadership with Han or Manchu governors and Chinese political institutions, and the promotion of Chinese settlement, law, language, and agriculture in places where these things were hitherto absent. As many scholars have noted, Zhao Erfeng, the official who launched wars against Tibetan leaders and established a new administration in Kham in the 1900s, referred to Western and Japanese colonialism as models (Ho 2008, 224; Sichuan Minzu Yanjiu Suo 1989, 1:247; Sigel 1966, 191; Sperling 1976, 23; E. Zhao and Wu 1984, 48). Though such references were few and brief, and Zhao's actual policy was probably more influenced by the more aggressive traditions within Qing governance in Inner Asia, he recognized the broad similarities of his aims to those of his peers in foreign colonial governments. "Colonial" is an apt description of the character of his regime, and one that has been used by other historians (Adshead 1984, 75; Tuttle 2005, 45–46).

Many colonial governments in inner and upland Asian were heavily dependent on funding from a central government. Ming rule in Guizhou and Yunnan, Qing rule in Xinjiang, and Tsarist rule in Turkestan were mostly financed by the center rather than taxes on local resources (Herman 2007, 137–38; Millward 1998; Morrison 2008, 291–92). Wang Xiuyu (2011) emphasizes the role of Sichuan in the late Qing campaigns in Kham, but financially they were a joint venture between Sichuan and the central government. In 1907, the court determined that Zhao Erfeng would receive two million taels to cover initial expenses—one million from the Ministry of Finance, and one million from the Sichuan government—and three million taels for annual expenses—two million from the maritime customs at Chongqing, Hankou, and Zhenjiang, and one million from Sichuan (Adshead 1984, 82). Taxes levied by Zhao in Kham came to only 68,200 taels in 1910 (Weng 1930, 168; Xikang sheng caizheng ting 1940, 37).

After 1911, central authority in the primary successor state to the Qing, the Republic of China, rapidly weakened and Chinese authority in Lhasa collapsed almost immediately. The Sichuan provincial government continued to pay most of the cost of the Chinese army in Kham, which was renamed the Sichuan-Kham Frontier Defense Force (*Chuan-Kang bian fang jun*). Despite revolts and a conflict with the Tibetan army that briefly eliminated Chinese power in 1914, the Sichuanese force regained a degree of control in some towns, as tax records and petitions from overburdened communities in Kham demonstrate (Sichuan Sheng Dang'an Guan and Sichuan Minzu Yanjiu Suo 1990, 99, 132, 157). Its position weakened dramatically as a result of the 1916–20 occupation of the Sichuan basin by the National Protection Army (*hu guo*

jun) (formed largely of Cai E's Yunnan army) after the latter defeated Sichuanese forces loyal to the would-be new emperor Yuan Shikai. The chief of the general staff of the National Protection Army, Luo Peijin, became the military governor of Sichuan and replaced officials in the Sichuan government with Yunnanese (Yi 2008, 86). Luo directed military spending toward his own forces and cut funding to Sichuanese military units (Wu 2006, 98; Yi 2008, 86). Sichuan forces, including the Frontier Defense Force, owed their staff and soldiers a total of more than two million yuan by April 1917 (Wu 2006, 99). British consul Eric Teichman commented that the garrisons in Kham "degenerated into little better than brigands" commanded by "ex-brigands and military adventurers" (Teichman 1922, 50–51).

The weakened Sichuanese forces managed to drive the Yunnanese army out of Sichuan in 1920. From then until the retreat of the Nationalists to Sichuan in 1938, the province was dominated by Sichuanese military leaders, of whom Liu Wenhui, an officer from Dayi County who had graduated from the Baoding Military Academy in 1916, was one of the most important. In 1927 Liu wrestled control of the Frontier Defense Force from Liu Chengxun and became the paramount leader of the Chinese military and political bodies in Kham. As James Leibold comments, Liu ruled parts of the highlands as his "fiefdom" until 1949 (Leibold 2007, 69). In 1933 he was forced out of the Sichuan basin by his first cousin and rival military leader Liu Xiang in a war that left Wenhui with Ya'an, the Anning river valley region in southwest Sichuan (which, together with the Yi territory in the surrounding Liang mountains was known as "Ningshu"), as well as the Chinese garrisons in Kham. The territories controlled by Liu Wenhui were combined into "Xikang Province" in 1939, an idea from the late Qing that had stalled in the turmoil of the early Republic.

Liu's rule meant the return of outside support for the Chinese garrisons and officials in Kham, though not at levels that matched late Qing spending on the region. Until his defeat in the Sichuan basin, Liu funded the garrisons with 800 taels per month from the Leshan salt tax (Xikang sheng caizheng ting 1940, 40). They relied entirely on taxes levied in Kham, Ya'an, and Ningshu in 1934, but from 1935 were supported by the National Military Council (*junshi weiyuanhui*), while Liu's civil administration received 15,000 yuan per month from the central government (Xikang sheng caizheng ting 1940, 40). Around 1936, the Guomindang opium suppression campaign forced poppy cultivation out of the Sichuan basin, and profits from Ningshu and Ya'an poppies skyrocketed (Baumler 2007, 218). Liu derived a large portion of his income from the drug, though it is impossible to determine exactly how much.

While Liu's regime left many parts of Kham untouched, it exercised real authority in significant areas of the east. In 1932, Chinese authorities in Rongdrak (Ch. Danba), Litang, Gyezur (Ch. Jiulong), and Nyakchu (Ch. Yajiang) collected a combined total of 1,509 Sichuanese *dan* of grain and 10,984 *zangyang* yuan[1] in various kinds of tax (*Ge xian liang shui diaocha biao* 1932). In that year, Liu deployed at least 8,000 soldiers in the region, a tiny number by Chinese standards, but a significant force in the Tibetan

[1]*Zangyang* yuan (literally, "Tibetan coin") was a currency produced by the late Qing government in an attempt to prevent the circulation of Indian rupees in Tibet, though circulation was confined to some regions of Kham. The *zangyang* yuan normally had a silver content of .32 taels (approximately 12 grams) (J. Yang 2006, 103).

lands. In 1909, at the height of the late Qing campaigns, there were around 6,000 Qing soldiers in Kham, and in 1936 the Lhasa government's army only contained 5,000 men, plus another 5,000 in irregular militias (Goldstein 1989, 280; Relyea 2010, 273; N. Ren [1933] 1996, 240).

After his defeat in the Sichuan basin, Liu managed to increase tax revenue from Kham. In 1939, his officials collected 13,352 *dan* of grain throughout the region (Xikang sheng canyihui 1940, 9:14). In the same year, the regime was running schools in Dartsemdo (Ch. Kangding), Chakzam (Ch. Luding), Kardzé (Ch. Ganzi), Tau (Ch. Daofu), Drakgo (Ch. Luhuo), Nyakrong (Ch. Xinlong), Nyakchu, and Litang, which enrolled a total of 4,282 students (Guomin Canzheng Hui Chuan Kang Jianshe Shicha Tuan [1939] 1971, 467–68). By 1942 there were also schools in Batang, Gyezur, and Rongdrak (Xikang sheng caizheng ting 1945, 12:19). In 1939 one of the regime's county governors surveyed Nyakrong and found it a patchwork of monastic, lay Khampa, and Chinese authority (Xu 1939). In one village, for example, he reported that about "half of the locals obey the [Chinese] county government" (Xu 1939, 64). In Drakgo, by 1945 Chinese county governors handled at least some lawsuits, although they did so in consideration of both Chinese and local law (Yin [1945] 2004, 139).

The functioning of the Chinese warlord regimes in Kham and their ability to repress Khampa self-rule movements depended on their capacity to deal with two basic problems. Firstly, without strong and consistent support from the central government, they had to raise more revenue locally, particularly before the beginning of large-scale opium exports from Ningshu and Ya'an. Secondly, without recourse to an air force or fleets of trucks, officials had to find ways of transporting civil and military personnel and supplies across Kham's rugged and sparsely populated terrain. The Qing had faced the same problem, but solutions were more difficult without outside support. This article argues that the way that governors dealt with these problems fundamentally shaped the development of a form of warlord colonial authority. The quest for more revenue led to a critical shift in policy regarding ownership and use of uncultivated land. Two solutions for the transport problem were attempted. One fostered the growth of a large state enterprise and a change in the nature of state-supported agriculture. The other shaped the nature of the relationships between Chinese authorities and Khampa leaders and communities.

The *'U-Lag* Problem And Attempted Solutions

As they did in other sparsely populated Inner Asian territory, Qing and Republican Chinese militaries and civilian bureaucracies in Kham used local corvée labor for government transport. This practice was not their invention. Chinese sources called the corvée "*wula*," after the Inner Asian term that is Romanized as *'u-lag* from Tibetan, *ulaq* from Turkic, and *ulagh* or *ulag-a* from Mongolian. Most successor states to the Mongol Empire had some form of tax that went by this name (Kumar 2007, 64–66). Broadly, it required owners of carrying animals to provide transport services to government officials and armies, either for free or for compensation at well below market transport rates.

This system was appropriate for the normal requirements of administrations like that in pre-twentieth-century Tibet, which delegated substantial authority to local monastic

institutions and lay aristocratic families (Goldstein 1989, 5). The central Tibetan government kept only a minimal military force, and did not maintain any kind of police force in rural areas. Even in these circumstances, the transportation corvée was still one of the "most difficult labour obligations" for taxpayers (Goldstein 1989, 4). The much bulkier institutions and bureaucracy that went with the developmental state that Chinese officials attempted to establish in the twentieth century placed great pressure on the system and the livestock owners who performed the corvée. Overburdened households revolted or ran away, making the transportation of goods and military equipment impossible and undermining government efforts to increase the population and revenue base (H. Liu et al. [1938] 2004; Zhu [1914] 2006).

Zhao Erfeng faced the same problem, but it was worse in the Republican era. This was partly because Republican-era officials were less able to offset the burden on *'u-lag* providers by paying them, which had been the classic Qing solution since the Kangxi reign (Chen 1984, 48–52). One investigator noted that "nobody can pay half a *zangyang* yuan," the amount per animal stipulated by the regulations that Zhao Erfeng had created (Yu 1937, 47). In addition, Republican-era governors were forced to collect more tax locally, and doing so required more official journeys. The late Qing administration in Kham had not bothered to collect tax from bands of miners numbering less than six, or households with fewer than around a dozen animals (X. Liu 2007, 31; Sichuan Minzu Yanjiu Suo 1989, 3:836). As they sought to replace support from outside Kham, Republican-period military forces tried to collect as much tax from as many people as possible. In 1934, villagers near Dartsemdo complained via petition that:

> If the gold miners run away [from the tax collectors], they send us to catch them, this is on top of the regular corvée labour service. If the commissioners continue to do this, the people who undertake the labour service will be unable to bear the suffering it causes. (*Kangding shu Mujuchengzi cun cunzhang minzhong bing* 1934)

Chinese governors routinely described the *'u-lag* as one of the major burdens for the people of Kham, and its inefficiencies and limitations as one of the major obstacles to Chinese power in the region.

Liu Wenhui and his predecessors in Kham attempted two kinds of solutions. The first was to build on Qing attempts to ameliorate *'u-lag* with regulation. To this end, most Han authorities in Kham announced new regulations to add to the already weighty code bequeathed to them by the Qing administration, and a whole new code was created in 1929 (Sichuan Sheng Dang'an Guan and Sichuan Minzu Yanjiu Suo 1990, 199, 200–202; Yu 1937). Regulations mandated maximum journey lengths, maximum loads, payments for labor, and compensation for dead animals. This made *'u-lag*—in theory—the most intensely managed aspect of the relationship between the regional Chinese government and local society. The second solution for the *'u-lag* problem was the complete abolition of the system and the establishment of government-owned ranches to raise livestock for government and military transport. There were two attempts to do this. The State *'u-lag* Agency (*Guan yun wula shiwusuo*) was established in 1932, and it was followed in 1938 by the Xikang Animal Transport Company (*Mu yun gongsi*). Both strategies had important implications for the development of Chinese colonial authority.

Each attempt at regulation of the corvée entailed efforts to bureaucratize the position of the Tibetan leaders who organized it because virtually all Chinese officials regarded the autonomy of such leaders as a key aspect of the problems with the system. Ren Zhuo (1940, 17), the author of an article in a journal produced for the Xikang provincial bureaucracy, *Kham Guide Monthly* (*Kangdao yuekan*) wrote:

> Although the authority to requisition *'u-lag* in Kham in theory belongs to the government, the great power of levying the corvée is in reality wielded by the native headmen. The headmen of Kham dare to openly act according to their own whim, without paying attention to any rule or restraint. They hold the government in the palm of their hand and bully the people. They are stubborn and obstinate and make themselves a great obstacle for the government's rule. Indeed, with their power over transport they are in control of everything.

There were cases in which local agents used their position in the *'u-lag* system to derive private profit, developing positions of semi-independent authority in much the same way that the entrepreneurial brokers did in the northern Chinese villages studied by Duara (1988, 73–75). Liu Wenhui's garrison commander in Nyakchu complained about one Tibetan village leader who had exempted certain households from the corvée in exchange for cash payments, in effect appropriating some of the value of the corvée (Niansi jun jiyaochu you guan Kangqu jiaotong dang'an [1932] 2006, 473). The regime's Chinese agents did the same. A local strongman-merchant of Tau, "Barbarian King" Ding (Ding Manwang), arrived as a Qing-period settler and constructed a personal fortress that had enabled him to hold out against a 1911 lama-led uprising, which earned him enough authority to be made chief of the local militia (*mintuan*) when a Chinese army returned (N. Ren [1933] 1996, 263). Ding also arranged the corvée duties, a role he profited from by exempting militia members from *'u-lag* and charging a fee for the privilege of joining, which reportedly earned him more than 10,000 yuan.

People such as Ding contributed to the problems with the corvée system, but no more so than the officers who used *'u-lag* for private business trips or neglected the welfare of the animals, causing them to die. Nevertheless, it was easier to blame the mostly Tibetan local agents, and Liu Wenhui's government attempted to step up its supervision of them and integrate them within the regime where possible. In 1932, Liu's military formalized the position of some of its Tibetan agents (whom they called *tusi*, "native officials," even though the *tusi* title had been officially abolished by Zhao Erfeng) by giving them regular positions in the military bureaucracy.

> On both the northern and southern routes [through Kham], the *tusi* have been permitted by the commander of the Defense Force to fill offices supervising militia (*tuanwu jiandu*) and managing the transport of provisions. They receive a substantial monthly wage. (Niansi jun jiyaochu you guan Kangqu jiaotong dang'an [1932] 2006, 465)

In 1938 the regime attempted to increase its control over its agents further with the creation of an *'u-lag* supervisory system (*jiancha zhidu*), according to which officers were posted at key locations around Kham. Zhang Zhen'guo, who filled this post at Tau,

complained about how hard the job was (Zhang 1940, 132). It is difficult to determine how much impact the system had (if any) on the enforcement of the regulations, but it meant an extra official based in Tibetan communities with a mandate to supervise both Chinese and Tibetan leaders' use of corvée labor.

And despite "Barbarian King" Ding's prestige among the Chinese in Kham—one of Liu's employees commented that "there were no other Han merchants in the north of Kham with his ability and status"—he was increasingly isolated by Liu's government (N. Ren [1933] 1996, 263). The Xikang Special Administrative Committee sided against him when he was sued by another merchant in 1928, and Liu's army did not help when he was attacked by Khampa near Darstemdo who wanted their *'u-lag* money. Ding was forced to pay up, and his power and prestige faded in the 1930s. Ding was a member of the group of "Xikang residents" who complained about Liu in a petition to the Nanjing government in 1929, but to no avail (Sichuan Sheng Dang'an Guan and Sichuan Minzu Yanjiu Suo 1990, 50).

Because of the corvée, the regime's interaction with Khampa leadership was very different from its interaction with Yi leadership in Ningshu, where there was no *'u-lag* and no tax system in which Yi leaders had a comparable role. Chinese officials maintained relationships with Yi leaders, whom they contracted to provide security on the borders of the territory settled by Han (Chongqing Zhongguo Yinhang Diaocha Zuzhi 1935, 138). But this was a very different kind of role; it was less bureaucratized, and Liu's governors made no attempt to monitor Yi leaders' relationships with Yi society.

Another difference between Kham and Ningshu was that through a prejudiced interpretation of the *'u-lag* system that blamed Tibetan agents for all of the system's problems, some officials in Kham became champions of state enterprise. Ren Zhuo (1940, 17) wrote:

> It is vital to establish a state-managed animal transport system in Kham in order to take full control of transport. [… Only thus] can the new administration of Kham develop properly. There is no other rational way forward. The obstreperous headmen know that state-managed transport is not in their interests so they oppose it, but their opposition must not cause the government to decline to take up the long neglected keys to power.

In Ningshu there were plenty of officials with prejudices against the Yi, but this did not necessarily drive them to support state-owned industry or agriculture.

Both transport organizations established by Liu's regime in Kham failed, probably because they were under-resourced. Their livestock died in large numbers, and the organizations were disbanded within a few years of their establishment. Nevertheless, advocacy for this position and the experiments that it generated made a significant contribution to making Liu's development policy different from Zhao Erfeng's. The post-1905 Qing administration had established a tannery at Batang, but displayed little real interest in livestock farming. While the tannery cost 24,000 taels, Zhao spent 60,000 taels on encouraging crop-growing in 1906 alone (He 2001, 43; Ma 2002, 161). His officials very rarely mentioned livestock farming in their writing (X. Wang 2011, 232). In 1940, Liu Wenhui blamed the failure of the transport organizations on the fact that "Han people are several thousand years removed from nomadic life" and

therefore did not know enough about livestock farming (W. Liu 1940a, 5). Zhang Zhen'guo, the *'u-lag* supervisor at Tau, also blamed ignorance and a lack of veterinary medicine, as well as poor management (Zhang 1940, 133). That year, Liu's government decided that the Xikang Agriculture Improvement Institute (*nongye gaijin suo*) should focus on livestock farming, and that a million yuan would be spent improving animal stock and veterinary medicine in the following year (*Xikang sheng nongye gaijin suo gongzuo yuebao* 1940).

Although the 1938 Animal Transport Company failed, its livestock ranch near the Gartar Jampa monastery in the region of Tau (at sites called Taining and Qianning in Chinese) continued to operate under the management of the Agriculture Improvement Institute. The Gartar ranch covered more than 1,000 *mu* (67 hectares) (*Qianning kenmu chang cheng* 1948). It was the best-funded government agricultural enterprise in Xikang Province, receiving 37 percent more investment than the second most highly funded enterprise in the province between 1939 and 1943 (Y. Liu 1944, 5–6). When Peter Goullart visited in 1939, he found several hundred yaks, imported Holstein bulls, sheep, and pigs "everywhere" (Goullart 1959, 33–34, 49). In 1944 the Xikang Agriculture Improvement Institute and the central government Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry jointly established a Cultivation Management Office (*kenwu guanliju*) at the ranch, which employed a staff of fifty-two people, not including actual farmers (of whom there were few) (*Nonglin bu Xikang Taining kenqu guanli ju sanshiwu nian qiansan renyuan gongliang fei baohe qingce* 1946; *Xikang Taining kenqu choubei banli* 1944). After 1949 the farm underwent several changes to its name and character, but remained a part of the landscape of what is now called Bamei Township (C. Wang 2005, 69).

A final effect of *'u-lag* was that it amplified conflict between the regional Chinese government and Tibetan leaders who were outside its control. Tensions related to the corvée were important in the development of the conflict between Liu Wenhui and the Panchen Lama's field office in Kardzé. The office had gone to Kardzé in 1938 having run out of supplies at its temporary Qinghai base, where the lama's journey back to Tibet had stalled (Lin 2006, 110–11). In late 1939, the field office disarmed Liu's garrison in Kardzé with the aid of Khampa allies from Kardzé and Nyakrong. Liu organized a counterattack and drove the field office out of Kham within two months, though he allowed 500 Khampa fighters and a leader from Nyakrong to return (S. Zhao 1941).

In most accounts, Liu's government is portrayed as a passive party in these events. Peng Wenbin summarizes the Kardzé conflict as a campaign "against Liu Wenhui, *couched in* the appeal of 'Kham for the Khampas'" (Peng 2002, 72). However, Liu had certainly not been anxious to avoid the conflict; indeed he seems to have deliberately courted it. The office's attack on the Kardzé garrison was precipitated by Liu's arrest and imprisonment of Déchen Wangmo (Bde chen dbang mo), a daughter of the Khangsar family, one of the most powerful families in northern Kham, and the bride-to-be of a member of the field office's staff. There were political implications to the marriage, but there were many and more lucrative parts of Xikang Province that were partially or totally outside the control of Liu's forces, so it is important to ask why they singled out the field office. Granted, it was strongly connected to the Guomindang, but attacking the Guomindang's ally could also have backfired for Liu and cost him some of the support that he also received from the party.

Matters related to the transport corvée were an important factor in the buildup of tension between Liu Wenhui's regime and the lama's field office. The office levied a large amount of *'u-lag* for the transport of goods and personnel (Li 1940, 11). Its Guomindang supporters noted that payments for corvée labor consumed a significant portion of its income, and the entourages of the office's visitors also made full use of the system (*Guofang zuigao huiyi* 1938). In a report of his 1937 visit, Dai Jitao wrote that the officials dispatched by the field office to accompany him "required more than 600 pack animals on the outward trip and about 400 for the return trip, which were all provided by local people and officers as per custom" (Dai 1938, 1824). This was in addition to the animals conscripted by the unit that Liu Wenhui sent with Dai. Dai noted that the members of the field office "did their utmost to limit the number of animals they levied" (1824), which suggests that there was very little slack in the system.

Despite the efforts of the field office to limit its use of the corvée, the Dartsemdo-based customs bureau and merchant community "complained vociferously" about the number of animals the office used (Li 1940, 11). Merchants argued that 70 percent of the goods the office transported from Sichuan to Kardzé—in trains of "hundreds of pack animals"—consisted of commercial goods for sale rather than vital supplies (Li 1940, 11). Whether or not this claim was true, merchants who believed it would have been angry for two reasons. Firstly, transport costs made up a large portion of the price of goods imported to Kham from outside. With *'u-lag* transport at below-market rates, the field office would have been able to significantly undercut the merchants' prices. Secondly, because transport resources were severely limited, trains with hundreds of *'u-lag* pack animals could very plausibly have driven up the prices that the merchants had to pay. War-related inflation began in 1939, so the rising transport prices were not necessarily due to the field office, but it is not surprising that the merchants drew such a connection. The Dartsemdo tax authorities predictably sided with the merchants. The latter were generally taxpayers, and they had a plausible case that they were losing business to an organization that did not pay tax. The *'u-lag* levied by the Panchen Lama's field office was certainly not the only reason for the Kardzé conflict, but it meant that the office's presence in Kardzé had an impact on traders in other parts of Kham, and contributed to the antagonism between the office and Liu's officials.

In sum, the *'u-lag* system had a highly significant impact on the development of Chinese warlord authority in Kham. To make use of the corvée, officers had to rely on Tibetan agents, but many blamed the agents for the system's problems. In response, warlord regimes attempted to increase their control over the middlemen. When this failed to fix the problems, and with dependence on distrusted Tibetan agents a continued source of anxiety among disgruntled officials, Liu Wenhui's regime attempted to forgo *'u-lag* entirely and cater for government transport needs by establishing a state-owned ranch system. Without reliable outside support, this still had to be funded through taxes raised in Kham, though such taxes could have been designed to avoid some of the inevitable problems with *'u-lag*: overtaxation of communities near major roads, and the lack of an incentive for users of *'u-lag* to take proper care of animals. The attempts to build an alternative transport organization failed too, probably because they lacked sufficient funding. However, they did leave a substantial legacy in the form of a large government-managed livestock ranch that absorbed the bulk of the funding Liu provided for agricultural development in Kham.

Revenue And "Wasteland"

The unreliability of subsidies from Sichuan and the central government made it harder for Republican-era military governments to afford compensatory payments to *'u-lag* providers than it had been for Zhao Erfeng's administration. It also forced them to attempt to collect more revenue locally. The Republican period was an age of fiscal innovation throughout China. Taxes that became important for Chinese authorities in Kham—the deed tax and the butchery tax—were also significant in other parts of the country. In Kham, they had important implications for government policy relating to land ownership.

To foster land cultivation, Zhao Erfeng ruled that all wasteland (*huang*) belonged to the state, and would be rented to anyone who wished to cultivate it (Sichuan Minzu Yanjiu Suo 1989, 1:97–98). Throughout the Republican period, regulations continued to proclaim that *huang* land belonged to the state (Sichuan Sheng Dang'an Guan and Sichuan Minzu Yanjiu Suo 1990, 80; Tu 1944, 63). However, there was a big difference between official regulation and actual practice. In 1936 an aggrieved member of a Bank of China research team wrote a tirade against the Dartsemdo local authorities in *Sichuan Frontier Quarterly*, a journal that aimed to promote investment in and political engagement with Kham and other non-Han territories west of the Sichuan basin. The county government, the writer alleged, was allowing local Tibetan households the right to charge Chinese settlers rent for use of *huang* land (Chongqing Zhongguo Yinhang Diaocha Zuzhi 1936, 162–3). The writer highlighted the case of a man who was forced to pay rent to bury his wife on a *huang* hillside. Many aspects of the case caused outrage. The rent was "ten times higher than in Shanghai" (163) (which is hard to believe). The land owners allegedly robbed and murdered people who did not pay up. But the core problem was the idea that this type of land could be privately owned at all. "*Huang* land like this, according to regulations in the president's Fundamentals of National Reconstruction (*jianguo dagang*) 'belongs to local governments, and must be used for local enterprises for the public good'" (162). By rights, it was "national, publicly owned *huang* land" (162).

It was not only Han settlers who found that notional state ownership of *huang* land was fictional in reality. With the exception of the ranch near the Gartar monastery created for the Animal Transport Company, other state-owned enterprises operated by the Xikang Agriculture Improvement Institute rented the land they used from private landowners, even when the land was registered as wasteland or forest. The *huang* land used by a farm at Simaqiao near Dartsemdo was all rented—from a Catholic mission, a Tibetan household called the Wasi in the Chinese-language documents, and other landlords of uncertain ethnicity (*Kangding nongchang yewu gaikuang* 1949; *Simaqiao nongchang dang'an* 1944). The Xikang provincial government did expropriate small amounts of cultivated and uncultivated land for infrastructure projects like the Dartsemdo airstrip, and in this case Liu ordered that the households that had lost land be given compensation (W. Liu 1940b).

The decision to rent rather than expropriate *huang* land seems to indicate a surprising respect for private property from what Barnett called "one of the most oppressive (in my opinion, one of the worst) warlord regimes in China" (Barnett 1993, 448). It also had important consequences for the model of agricultural development employed by the

government and for settlement in general. After the military campaigns had been paid for, it had cost the Qing administration nothing to appropriate *huang* land as state property and distribute it to garrisons or settlers. The Gartar ranch aside, Republican-period government enterprises rented the land they used and did not always find it easy to pay their landlords. The manager of the Simaqiao farm complained: "After paying the rent there is very little left. If the weather is dry, output drops significantly and self-sufficiency is very difficult" (*Kangding nongchang yewu gaikuang* 1949). Managers had good reason to think carefully about the value of acquiring more land and the use to which it could be put.

It is unlikely that the *huang*-owning Tibetans near Dartsemdo were simply too powerful for Liu's army. In 1933, Liu was forced out of the Sichuan basin by his first cousin Liu Xiang, but was still strong enough to suppress the Panchen Lama's field office in 1939. Several sources state that even after the retreat from the Sichuan basin, Liu's army forces had around 20,000 men (Cai 1997, 46; Ni 2006, 34). In the late 1940s, Barnett noted that they were well-armed and had plenty of ammunition (Barnett 1963, 220–21).

The regime's decision not to appropriate *huang* land was very likely related to the way that local officials in Chinese warlord governments in Kham drew on the territory's resources. In addition to the problems with the *'u-lag* system, the increasing importance of taxes on livestock made the pastoral economy more important to Chinese regimes in the Republican period than it had been to their Qing counterparts. Consequently, a dichotomy could no longer be clearly posed between "productive" cropland and *huang* land that late Qing officials had seen as unproductive. Furthermore, taxes on the creation and trading of land title came to constitute an important source of local government revenue, which created an incentive to issue legal title to *huang* land.

Even though livestock farming was a more significant part of the Kham economy than crop-growing, almost all the revenue collected by Zhao Erfeng's colonial government from Kham resources had come in the form of taxes levied on cultivated land. Using the official price of 20 *zangyang* yuan per *dan* of highland barley, the Dartsemdo County land tax was worth 20,760 *zangyang* yuan in 1910— 99 percent of the tax collected by the county government. There were monetary taxes on livestock, but they only yielded 203 *zangyang* yuan (Sichuan Sheng Dang'an Guan and Sichuan Minzu Yanjiu Suo 1990, 86; E. Zhao and Wu 1984, 81). The only other Kham resource that generated a substantial amount of revenue for the government was salt from Tsakalo (Ch. Yanjing) (X. Wang 2011, 130, 198; Xikang sheng caizheng ting 1940, 37). Livestock owners faced the *'u-lag*, which could be much more onerous than the land tax. The *'u-lag*, however, did not yield cash income for governments. Assuming that local administrators in Zhao's regime believed there were sufficient livestock in their vicinity to meet the *'u-lag*, the Qing tax system incentivized them to promote the conversion of grazing land to cropland (even though environmental conditions made increased cultivation impossible or unlikely in many places, as Zhao Erfeng came to realize).

Sources of local government income changed significantly in the Republican period. From the mid-1930s, opium was an important source of revenue for Liu Wenhui's regime, though most of this was grown in Liangshan and Ya'an rather than the parts of Kham that Liu Wenhui controlled (Guomin Canzheng Hui Chuan Kang Jianshe Shicha Tuan [1939] 1971, 406). The region around Zungchu (Ch. Songpan) produced

a lot of opium but was not part of Liu's dominion. For the lowest-ranking officials in the Chinese warlord regimes in Kham, the key change was that revenue generated by livestock-related taxes and taxes on property deeds became much more significant than it had been in the Qing, which undermined the Qing legal distinction between cultivated and uncultivated land.

The new butchery tax (*tu shui*), which was an indirect tax on livestock, accounted for 20 percent of Dartsemdo County's revenue in 1932, and the livestock tax contributed a further 4 percent (*Ge xian liang shui diaocha biao* 1932). In 1939 butchery taxes (including the "supplementary butchery tax") were equal to 36 percent of the value of the county's land taxes (including "supplementary" levies) (Xikang sheng caizheng ting 1940, n.p. following 112, 120, 246).

With the rising fiscal importance of taxes on animal products, Liu Wenhui's government began to distinguish between "*huang*" and "pastoral land" (*mudi*, *muchang*). A set of "land rights principles" (*di quan yuanze*) drafted in 1939 separated the two (but did not determine how they could be differentiated in practice): "Forested land and *huang* are without exception considered public property"; but "pastoral land shall be communally owned by groups of pastoralists (*mu min*)" (Tu 1944, 63). Other institutions in Xikang, such as the Agriculture Improvement Institute, also adopted the term "pastoral land" but listed it as a subcategory of *huang* (*Xikang sheng tudi hukou diaocha biao* 1947). The term "*huang*" was therefore more ambiguous in the late Republican period than it had been in the Qing. Zhao Erfeng's colonial government posed a relatively simple dichotomy between cultivated land (taxed and subject to private ownership) and everything else, which was normally called *huang*, taxed very lightly if at all, and not considered subject to legitimate private ownership claims. By the late Republic, pastoral land was more heavily taxed and sometimes conceptually distinguished from *huang*, in which case government codes recognized the possibility of private ownership.

Even though a radical distinction between *huang* (inclusive of grazing land) and cultivated land now made less sense, the government could have decided to appropriate grazing land anyway as a part of an atavistic return to Qing policy. However, before 1911 almost nobody in the Kham had possessed title deeds to uncultivated land issued by a Chinese government, and this also changed dramatically in the Republican period, for two reasons. Firstly, cash-strapped county officials sold land appropriated by the Qing administration, though no documents used by this study indicate how much (Goré 1923, 52; Wissing 2004, 160). This appears to have happened more in the early Republican period, though in 1932 tax records from Dartsemdo also recorded income from sales and mortgaging of land (*Ge xian liang shui diaocha biao* 1932).[2]

Secondly, in order to increase revenue, Chinese officials across Kham bullied as many Tibetans as they could into registering their land with them—for which they had to pay the deed tax. In 1914 the Sichuan Frontier Department of Finance established a Deed Tax Collection Office. It noted:

[2]"*Tian-fang chushou*" and "*Tian-fang chudang*" might alternatively have referred to the deed tax (*qishui*, discussed below), though if so it is the only case in the documents used by this study in which tax on land transactions involving private parties was not referred to as *qishui*.

> [In Kham] there are no official deeds, and there are frequent disputes caused by allegations of trespassing. Now, deeds will be granted to landowners without exception, in order to prevent conflicts and increase tax revenue (*yu shui ru*). (Sichuan Sheng Dang'an Guan and Sichuan Minzu Yanjiu Suo 1990, 113)

The same lines or variations of them appeared multiple times in government communications on the subject (*Chuanbian zhenshou fu qishui chouban chu cheng* 1914). Because only a very small number of landowners in Dartsemdo and Chakzam Counties already possessed land deeds, estimations of the potential income to be derived by forcing Tibetans to register their land were very large indeed. The magistrate in Gonjo (Ch. Gongjue) figured that about 35,000 *zangyang* yuan would be collected in deed tax from his small and thinly populated county (Sichuan Sheng Dang'an Guan and Sichuan Minzu Yanjiu Suo 1990, 117). This must have been a great overestimate, but actual income could still be substantial. In 1916 the county authorities in Gyezur succeeded in raising 4,170 *dayang* yuan[3] by issuing deeds for property categorized as "fields," "pasture," "buildings," or "temple estate" (120). In the past, officials had had an incentive to register land as *huang* so that migrants could be settled on it; now there was an incentive to register it in another category and permit private ownership of it so that more tax could be collected. The 4,170 *dayang* yuan may have been a disappointment, but it should have been enough to meet the grain requirements of a garrison of around 150 soldiers for about a year (in a county of around 12,000 people) (Qiu 1939, 42).

The initial deed tax bonanza ended after those landowners who could be coerced or otherwise persuaded into paying for an official title deed did so. Thereafter the tax was collected when the government issued new deeds to purchasers of real estate. In places where there was a significant amount of buying and selling of land, revenue could still be substantial. In 1939 the deed tax generated 7,650 yuan in Dartsemdo County (Xikang sheng caizheng ting 1945, 6:7). The same year, the land tax amounted to 956 *dan* of grain, which, according to the formula used by Liu's tax bureaucracy, was worth 14,334 yuan (Xikang sheng caizheng ting 1940, n.p. following 112). Although the land tax was still twice as valuable, the deed tax contributed a very significant proportion of county revenue. Liu's tax officials calculated that throughout Xikang Province, the deed tax income was equivalent to one-third of the land tax income in 1940 (Xikang sheng caizheng ting 1945, 5:16). Moreover, it was a tax that retained its importance through the era of hyperinflation because it was collected as a percentage of transactions' value, rather than as a fixed amount (like the livestock tax), and it was collected throughout the year.

Just as in early Republican Kham, county officials mindful of the importance of this source of revenue had an incentive to grant individuals title to uncultivated land. A Dartsemdo County government list of land transactions from 1940 gave a single-word description of the type of land involved for each transaction, and some stated that the land was, indeed, *huang* or forest (*Kangding xian xianfu chengbao dian mai qishui zhengshou* 1940). Most of the records simply described the land in question as "mountain land"

[3]"*Dayang* yuan" was what the frontier authorities called the foreign silver coins that circulated in what they called "Interior China" (i.e., "China Proper"), with a normal silver content of .72 taels, so one *dayang* yuan was equal to 2.25 *zangyang* yuan.

(*shan di*) without noting what, if anything, it was used for. Buyers (or the tax office) may well have recorded uncultivated or forested land as "mountain land" as a precaution against problems that could have arisen had the government decided to make good its proclamations that *huang* land was public property. Although most of the names in the records are Han Chinese names, some transactions involved Tibetan purchasers (and more might have involved Tibetans using Han-sounding names).

Subjectively, the *huang* land that officials encountered in the late Republican period was different from the *huang* land that the Qing administration had dealt with. It produced almost no income for the Qing government, but a substantial amount of revenue for the Republican governments. Moreover, in the Qing it had not been covered with any form of legal title that Chinese governments recognized. By the late Republican period, large numbers of people, particularly those nearby Chinese administrative centers and including Tibetans, possessed titles to *huang* land that had been created by local Chinese authorities. The Qing notion that *huang* land belonged to the state continued to be repeated in policy statements. But a strict dichotomy between *huang* and cropland no longer existed in practice.

Colonialism in the Himalaya: Conclusions and Comparisons

James Scott (2009) describes a long-term struggle between communities in upland Southeast Asia that rejected the state as a form of political organization, and the lowland states that have sought to colonize their lands. It is difficult to situate the Republican-era Chinese warlords who operated in parts of Kham after the fall of the Qing within this interpretive framework. After the 1911 revolution, the bonds between different layers of authority in the Chinese state weakened and in some cases disappeared completely. The colonial regime the Qing had created in Kham was cut adrift after the Yunnanese occupation of Sichuan, and having established control over the Chinese garrisons in the region, Liu Wenhui sought to restrict outside influence. Chinese warlords in Republican-period Kham were not really agents of the Chinese state, but nor were they anarchists who rejected the idea of state institutions. Without strong connections to the Chinese central government, Liu and his post-1911 predecessors in Kham had to modify or elaborate on certain aspects of the policies left by the Qing colonial regime.

The eighteenth-century Qing body of practice for borderlands governance included both laissez-faire maintenance of indigenous custom and colonial settlements called *tun* that existed to provide food for frontier garrisons. These were state-controlled communities composed either of soldier-farmers or civilians who were subject to regimes of management reminiscent of those in the military. Scholars have been alert to the late nineteenth-century shift in governing principles that led to attempts to remove indigenous authority and establish Chinese administration and aspects of Chinese culture. But most of the policies that Zhao Erfeng created to integrate Kham more firmly within the empire drew on the more interventionist wing of earlier Qing practice. Migration was to be tightly controlled, and the agricultural colonies his regime founded were within the long tradition of *tun* settlement. Uncultivated *huang* land was to be owned by the state, and migrants who cultivated it would receive permanent tenancy rights but not full ownership (X. Wang 2011, 193). Zhao stated repeatedly that such land was

"state property (*guojia gongchan*). It is different from the property one inherits from ancestors (*zuye*)" (Sichuan Minzu Yanjiu Suo 1989, 1:97–98). Zhao also discouraged settlers from subletting their land by holding them legally responsible for any problems caused by the subtenant. Land policy like this differentiated his regime from administration in China.

The need to raise more cash locally forced the warlord governments of the Republican period to innovate and move away from Qing precedent. They expanded taxes on livestock and land title, which meant allowing private ownership of *huang* land in practice if not in rhetoric. Less support from the central government also made problems with the *'u-lag* corvée labor system worse because officials needed to levy more *'u-lag* to collect more tax locally and had less money to pay those who performed the corvée. Twice Liu's regime attempted to deal with the problem by establishing ranches that would raise pack animals for official transport. Neither was successful, but the efforts meant that a large state-owned ranch was the most significant enterprise managed by the Xikang Agriculture Improvement Institute. The other solution to the *'u-lag* problem consisted of expanded attempts to regulate the corvée, and efforts to supervise the actions of local agents, integrate them into the military bureaucracy, and, on at least one occasion, undermine their authority.

Other colonial regimes in the Himalaya and foothills faced the same problems as the Qing officials and their Chinese warlord successors in Kham, and interacted in similar ways with local people and resources. Zhao ruled that *huang* land in Kham belonged to the Qing state, and in the several laws promulgated from 1865 onwards the British Indian state granted itself control over forested land (though it allowed people to make certain claims to use-rights). The British also adapted indigenous systems of corvée labor (called *begar* and *utar*) for transport in mountainous territory without readily available or cheap commercial transport. At precisely the same time that Zhao Erfeng declared that there would be no corvée without payment in Kham, British officials made similar pronouncements in Uttarakhand and Kashmir (Pathak 1991, 265). As in Kham, however, repeated attempts at regulation failed to prevent officials' continued conscription of labor for transport at levels that caused significant hardship in mountain communities.

The 1910s and 1920s saw a divergence between patterns of colonial rule in the southern and eastern Himalaya. Opposition to the British use of corvée was well-organized, galvanized by hill soldiers returning from service in World War I, and coincided with Gandhi's non-cooperation movement (Pathak 1991, 266). There were more than 146 anti-*begar* meetings in Uttarakhand in the first four months of 1921 (Guha 2000, 112). British and Chinese authority also followed vastly different trajectories. The commissioner for Kumaun (one of the two subregions of Uttarakhand) saw the territory that he was in charge of as (in Pathak's paraphrasing) "a small, hot part of a vast country" (Pathak 1991, 275). The British repression of protest against *begar* was harsh, but in 1921 provincial officials calculated that it was not worth continuing the fight for their right to corvée labor for transport in a territory they themselves viewed as not particularly important. In that year, *begar* was abolished and in the following year the government of India spent more than 160,000 rupees on hiring porters for officials travelling in the hills, an elaboration on the mid- and late-Qing governors' approach

that was not available to the cash-strapped, semi-independent Chinese warlords in the Republican period (Guha 2000, 112).

Post-1911 China is not the only case in which an imperial state has fragmented and left dependent colonial administrations with major financial problems; Tajikistan in particular faced enormous budget shortfalls after the Soviet collapse (Lezhnev 2005, 54). Accounts of places affected by a sudden withdrawal of central state support for a colonial government often tell a story of a descent into rule by bandits and warlords (Lezhnev 2005). Contemporary observers tended to characterize the Chinese regimes in Kham similarly. Whether Liu Wenhui ran one of the worst warlord governments in China, as Barnett thought, or an administration that was fairly similar to other military regimes, the taxation policies and practices of warlords merit analysis just as much as those of unified states. There were clear patterns in the way that the Republican warlords in Kham attempted to respond to the challenges of having less support than their imperial predecessors. However mixed the results, these strategies affected how officials dealt with uncultivated land and Tibetan leadership. It remains to be seen whether the fragmentation of an imperial state met with similar responses from other orphaned colonial regimes in Inner Asia.

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