Introduction to "Frontier Tibet: Trade and Boundaries of Authority in Kham"

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Introduction to "Frontier Tibet: Trade and Boundaries of Authority in Kham"

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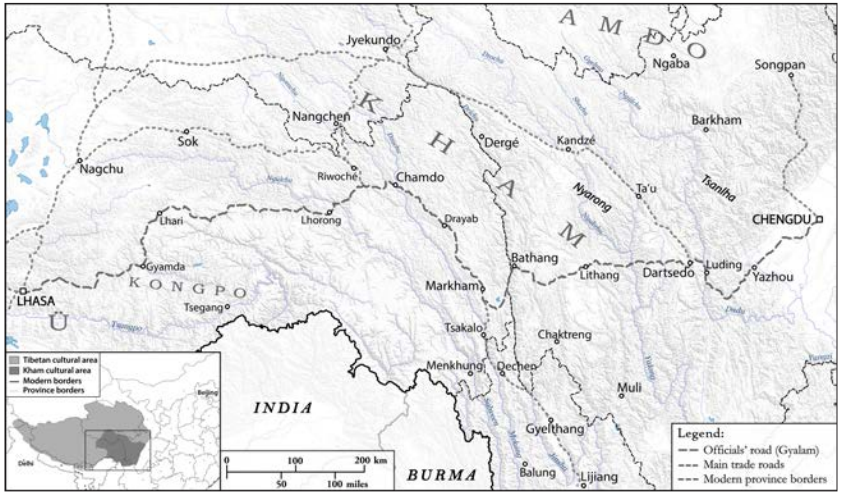
This special issue of *Cross-Currents* focuses on the region of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands that Tibetans call Kham: a historical frontier where several spheres of authority have competed, expanded or retracted, and sometimes overlapped. It has long constituted a buffer zone between the larger political entities of Central Tibet and China proper, and is an area that crosses cultural, ecological, and political boundaries.

Kham is one of three traditional divisions of the geographical space that makes up what is often called "cultural Tibet" or "ethnographic Tibet," together with the central region of Ü-Tsang and the northeastern region of Amdo (see map 1). What makes the history of eastern Tibet special, as Wim van Spengen and Lama Jabb (2009, 7) have rightly argued, is its "relative location" vis-à-vis China and Central Tibet, an in-betweenness that make it a "contingent region" (Tsomu 2015, 1), both an interface and a place in its own right. Despite evidence of the relative autonomy—or even sometimes independence—of the disjointed polities that have made up Kham throughout history, its intermediate location and relationship with the neighboring centers of power have contributed to its evolving topology.

The articles in this special issue of *Cross-Currents* stem from a collaborative project called "Territories, Communities, and Exchanges in the Kham Sino-Tibetan Borderlands."[1] Within the framework of this research project, the authors whose work appears here have avoided naturalizing any particular definition of Kham—although it is an inescapably endogenous category.



MAP 1. Geographical location of Kham. *Source:* Created by Rémi Chaix, based on data from NASA's Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (SRTM).

Regions are the products of contested historical and socio-spatial processes. In Kham, influences from multiple centers have been exercised with varying intensity, and belongings and allegiances themselves have been multiple and variable. As Peter Perdue (2005, 41) contended, "the frontier zone was a liminal space where cultural identities merged and shifted, as peoples of different ethnic and linguistic roots interacted for common economic purposes." These liminal areas can be seen as "microcosms," as Nicola Di Cosmo and Don J. Wyatt (2003) have proposed, where cultures and identities are constantly recomposed. In this issue, we adopt a multipolar approach to the adaptive and intrinsically mixed properties of border areas, which goes against unitary visions of China or Tibet. In doing so, we highlight the time-specific processes that took place in the history of this frontier, especially from the eighteenth century onward.

In order to decipher the processes that unfolded on the frontier, it is necessary to look closely at a wide range of issues, including migration, ethnic demographics, trade networks, indigenous notions of power or potency, political negotiations, political administration, and dissemination of knowledge about the frontier. This collective endeavor historicizes the frontier enterprise and brings to the fore aspects of state-building policies and pro-

cesses of territorialization manifest on both the Tibetan and Chinese sides. Perhaps more importantly, it seeks to lend greater visibility to the agency of local actors—as well as non-Han actors—in their varied responses to, and involvements and negotiations with, these "civilizing projects" and forces of change (Harrell 1995a; Shneiderman 2006).

The contributions in this issue focus on the period from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century, when this "frontier Tibet" formed a middle ground in which local communities, the central Tibetan government (Ganden Phodrang), the Chinese imperial government (Qing), and later the republican authorities negotiated means of accommodation and established new institutions and practices. Against this historical background, the articles address questions of economic history, cultural interchange, and political legitimation and contestation at critical historical junctures. They show in particular how historical developments in trade and commerce are interlaced with notions of wealth and value, and linked to political control and authority.[2] Together they bring new, ethnographically oriented historical studies into the arena of theoretical approaches to borderlands and corridors of contact.

In what follows, I highlight some of the main threads that tie the articles together. The articles do not exhaust the potential of the wide range of topics just mentioned: they modestly offer glimpses of a multifaceted Kham, a constellation of disparate local configurations that hopefully shed some light on the processes alluded to above. For the purpose of setting the stage for these contributions, I frame these processes first by addressing the distinction between *space* and *place*, which opens onto a discussion that lays the warp of this issue around the key terms of *empire* and *nation*, *borderlands* and *frontier*. Next, I refer to notions of *wealth* and *power*, which provide the weft of the rich tapestry of the authors' varied disciplinary takes on and respective engagement with issues of trade relations, networks and boundaries, and authority and sovereignty.

FROM SPACE TO PLACE: AN OVERVIEW

Our subject of study—the Kham region—corresponds to a conventionally recognized geographical area in Tibetan historical sources, and is pervasive in current representations of local identities both in China and within the

Tibetan community in exile. However, methodologically, it is necessary to question the way we take for granted the existence of bounded geographical-cum-cultural territories and more generally the isomorphism of space, place, and culture (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). To do justice to what makes Kham a particularly interesting but challenging space, we need to be attentive not only to the *physical space* and the *representational space* constitutive of Kham, but also to both endogenous and exogenous processes of *placemaking*.[3] These complex spatial entanglements (which can be only touched on here and in the articles themselves) inevitably challenge the temptation of regional fragmentation that would isolate Kham, as well as call for an explication of what "Sino-Tibetan" means when applied to this region and of what makes it a "borderland" or a "frontier." I will come back to each of these terms.

In other words, the analyses offered by the contributions to this issue are not forced into a prescribed geophysical regional framework: on the contrary, they acknowledge that regional boundaries are porous and that political and social processes move across these boundaries. By looking at Kham through diverse lenses and approaching it on varied scales, the authors here enrich the regional paradigm by taking into account forms of connectivity, conjunctions, and belongings that shatter the geographical cohesion: territorial inscription must be conceived of not only as heterogeneous and discontinuous, but also as relational (e.g., Jessop, Brenner, and Jones 2008). Thus, these articles build on the large body of scholarship that has criticized approaches to space as either fixed or static, or merely discursive, and provide a kaleidoscopic view of the social history of cross-regional linkages, interconnected and interdependent spaces, and people. They contribute to a "new regional geography" that, as discussed by Carolyn Cartier (2002), deals with historical processes of region formation and how local, regional, national, and global processes are mutually influential.

Kham itself is a historically produced regional category that escapes any straightforward characterization. Language, religion, ethnicity, political organization, and livelihoods diverge greatly across the region, and yet, in the eyes of many, Kham denotes a single place, a regional geographical referent, as well as a category of identity and belonging. It is generally described in Tibetan as the region of the "four rivers [and] six ranges" (Tib. *chushi gangdruk*), thereby inscribing it in the mountainous topography of the eastern edge of the Tibetan plateau (see map 1). However, Kham has

no clearly defined boundaries and it never constituted an administrative entity, so it remained to outsiders an ill-defined region or even a "vague stretch of country" (Coales 1919, 228). A failed attempt at forced political unification took place in the mid-nineteenth century under the leadership of the warrior Gönpo Namgyel (Tsomu 2015), but it was Republican China that—after the 1914 Simla Convention—achieved the region's administrative transformation into the ephemeral province of Xikang (1939–1952). Now, in the People's Republic of China (PRC), the area referred to as Kham is divided into four provinces: Sichuan, Yunnan, Qinghai, and the Tibetan Autonomous Region.[4] This evolving topology of Kham acquires its full meaning in the process of transforming borderless land into borderland, and from there into bordered-land, a process that is exemplary of "the frontier enterprise as a case of state-led, pragmatically driven territorialization" (Elliot 2014, 346). This echoes James A. Millward's (1996) early comment about the Qing—and post-Qing?—frontier as a *dynamic process* rather than a *place*.

As we narrow down the critical historical juncture of modern state formation that irremediably transformed the Kham region, our inspiration comes from an increasingly rich body of scholarly work within both history and anthropology. Although relatively understudied compared to Central Tibet or the region of Amdo farther north, and often described as peripheral or even marginal, Kham is now recognized in its own right and is the object of increasing scholarly attention. The first book-length scholarly study bridging individual research efforts on Kham is the seminal volume *Khams-pa Voices* (Epstein 2002). More recently, and directly relevant to this issue of *Cross-Currents*, several historians have focused on the imperial or republican policies aimed at taking control of Kham (Dai 2009; Ho 2008; Lawson 2013; Lin 2006; Relyea 2015a and 2015b; Wang 2011).[5]

In the Chinese academic context, "Kham(pa) studies" (Ch. *Kang(ba) xue*) has emerged as a new disciplinary field (Ze Po and Ge Lei 2004; Luobu and Zhao 2008). As such, it shares many concerns and approaches with studies that are primarily grouped under the designation of research on the "Tibetan-Yi corridor" (Ch. *Zang-Yi zoulang*), to use the term coined by the famous Chinese anthropologist Fei Xiaotong (1910–2005). Over the last decade, scholars in China have revived this coinage (Shi 2005) and, since then, a growing number of works about this corridor between Tibet and

China, especially on Kham during the late Qing and Republican periods (Shi 2011), have been published.

More recent works explore the local histories of parts of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands and address the mutual interaction of diverse ethnicities in the context of changing economic, political, and environmental forces. They approach "borders as liminal spaces" that are intrinsically ambivalent and unstable (Tenzin 2014, xiv), or they focus on "interstitial populations" (Roche 2014) in the context of porous and labile ethnic, linguistic, and territorial boundaries (see also Gros 2014a). Others scrutinize the roles local peoples have played in the sociopolitical and environmental transformation of these borderlands that generated "change in worlds" (Hayes 2014).

All these works constitute an invitation to reshape our understanding of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands in their diversity and connections with larger dynamics, and across the disciplinary divide of Sinology and Tibetology.[6] Some of these studies have significantly contributed to a multipolar social history of the Tibetan world and its internal diversity. They have also provided substantial new data for a broader trend, to which several of the authors in this issue also contribute, that investigates this borderland region in its ethnic diversity and through the telling of local histories rather than as a simple outgrowth of the civilizational forces emanating from the centers. In doing so, applying both micro- and macro-level analysis to the study of regional formation, we rally behind Mark C. Elliot's call to include "the people, languages, beliefs, and material culture of the imperial frontiers into the stories we tell" (2014, 351). This echoes a similar plea in the field of borderland studies more generally (Hämäläinen and Truett 2011), which is productively addressed by anthropological and historical approaches that search for "the indigenous historical voice" (Faure 2013) and reconsider the center-periphery paradigm as a historical construct. Frontier history is also ethnohistory. The articles in this issue tell stories of encounters, confrontations and dialogues, traveling (mis)representations, and the sense of self and belonging, which are seldom visible through the written records of the two main political players.

Shifting Boundaries of Authority: A Historical Background

As a zone of convergence, Kham became the theater of competing powers exerting claims of authority that led to tentative forced integration and con-

trol. The nature of this control as well as its actualization varied significantly over time. A brief historical sketch will help reveal the complex and shifting boundaries of authority and some of the entanglements between military, trade, religion, and politics.

One of the first major historical turns occurred in the tumultuous seventeenth century, with the rise of the Dalai Lamas and the advent of the Ganden Phodrang as the government of Tibet; meanwhile, in China, the Qing dynasty was just coming into power. The Mongol prince Güshri Khan began a campaign in support of the Geluk school of Buddhism to defeat opponents of the fifth Dalai Lama, who, in 1642, with this patronage, sought the unification of Tibet under a single regime. As the ruler of an increasingly centralized state, the fifth Dalai Lama tried to assert his authority farther east over the polities of Kham. In the process, many monasteries of rival orders had their possessions seized as they were converted into Geluk-led religious centers, and the Dalai Lama's Lhasa regime organized missions to conduct population censuses and tax collection.[7] Lhasa's influence on monasteries in Kham also meant increased interest in the local economy and politics of which monasteries were key actors.[8]

In the eighteenth century, the Ganden Phodrang succumbed to internal conflicts: a power struggle in Lhasa attracted Zunghar Mongol involvement, which in turn led the Qing to launch a military campaign in Lhasa (1720). These actions initiated the Qing court's loose suzerainty over the Tibetan government, and Beijing sought to consolidate its influence through the appointment of Manchu officials (*amban*).[9] The Qing intervention in Lhasa had significant repercussions on Kham. In the following years, the Qing erected the stone stele (1727) on a mountain pass (Bum la) between Bathang and Markham on Kham's southern "officials' road" (see map 1), thus marking the limit between the Dalai Lama's sphere of influence and the territorial domain of Sichuan Province to the east (see Relyea, this issue). In those lands now incorporated in Sichuan, the Qing emperor established garrisons (a few soldiers in each outpost) along the southern road leading to Lhasa and invested the lay rulers with titles (*tusi*, "indigenous chieftains") that integrated them nominally into the Chinese administration with taxes and tribute obligations. The Qing were seeking to make eastern Kham an imperial space.

From then on, there would be regular competition between Beijing and Lhasa for influence over Kham's local power holders, although their respective authority remained generally limited and tenuous. The most important direct Qing interventions were the two Jinchuan campaigns (1747–1749 and 1771–1776) in northwestern Sichuan's Tibetan region of Gyarong to quell internal feuds (see Tenzin, this issue). Launched in the heyday of frontier expansion under the reign of Emperor Qianlong (r. 1735–1796), these campaigns became the most costly of all Qing's frontier operations, and in their aftermath the policy of "substituting chieftains with state-appointed civilian officials" (*gaitu guiliu*, often glossed as "bureaucratization") was introduced in the area. These Qing interventions, combined with infrastructure work such as road building, led to limited Qing authority in certain parts of Kham (see Booz, this issue).

The next great political juncture, in the 1860s, was the failed attempt at political unification by Gönpo Namgyel from his base in Nyarong (see Tsomu 2015). In response, both Tibet and China endeavored to strengthen their grip on Kham because Gönpo Namgyel's expanding rule over neighboring polities, including the powerful kingdom of Dergé, posed a challenge to both the Lhasa government and the Chinese provincial authority of Sichuan. The Qing court's reluctance to make any military intervention in a period of financial drain and of Western imperialist threats gave Tibetan central authorities the opportunity to send in troops who successfully defeated Gönpo Namgyel (1865) and allowed them to extend their administrative rule over parts of Kham by appointing a high commissioner. For China, the geopolitical importance of Kham resurfaced as a major issue at the beginning of the twentieth century with the growing interests of various Western powers in Tibet—notably the British military incursion in Lhasa (1903–1904), which prompted the Qing to strengthen their control over the Kham region.

The broad strokes of this historical picture provide the time frame for the articles in this issue, starting in the eighteenth century with the growing importance of trade for Kham's economy (Booz and Chaix) and then moving into the post–Gönpo Namgyel period in the mid-nineteenth century, with Central Tibet and Qing's gradual territorial integration (Gros, Scott, Tenzin, and Tsomu). The articles thus stress the continuities and changes in the transition from the imperial to the national nature of these "expansive regimes," as C. Patterson Giersch aptly calls them in his afterword.

Empire to Nation

This special issue narrows its historical and topical focus to the critical period during the late Qing era (1644–1911) and the Republic of China (1912–1949), when Kham became an exemplary case of frontier expansion and state building, a process during which this region underwent state-led political integration. This process typically corresponds to one of the long-standing narratives of borderland studies, which recounts the transition alluded to at the beginning of this introduction—from empire to nation, and from borderlands to bordered lands (e.g., Adelman and Aron 1999).

As several authors have now emphasized, we need to look at "how borderlands have dealt with their states" (Baud and Van Schendel 1997, 235) to redress the imbalance of state-centered approaches, and to consider not just the agency of local actors *in reaction to* external forces but also how they created the conditions for borderlands histories (Hämäläinen and Truett 2011). Such a bottom-up approach may be even more necessary given what became an irreversible power struggle starting in the late nineteenth century in the name of sovereignty, nationalism, and modernization (e.g., Coleman 2014; Lawson 2013; Relyea 2015a, 2015b, and in this issue; Wang 2011). The wave of territorial conquest and reforms led by Frontier Commissioner Zhao Erfeng and the subsequent creation of the short-lived province of Xikang (1939–1955) have so far gathered the most attention (Sperling 1976; Peng 2002; Jagou 2006; Leibold 2005).[10] In spite of some continuities with imperial practices, the advent of the nation-state introduced some irrevocable changes that affected territories and ethnic groupings in the way they are conceived and lived.

For some time, "nationalism" has been the province of historians in Chinese studies, and "ethnicity" has been studied primarily by anthropologists. There have been considerable attempts to connect the two subjects in productive ways, and these have revived research on the relationship between center and periphery (e.g., Harrell 1995b; Rossabi 2004; Crossley, Siu, and Sutton 2006; Fiskesjö 2006; Faure and Ho 2013). Historians engaged in the deconstruction of a homogenous vision of Chinese culture and population have been inspired by anthropological perspectives on ethnicity (Crossley 1990) and have reexamined the identity of the Manchus, Mongols, Chinese Muslims (Hui), Miao, and others in an historical context, as well as the

forms of relations that existed between the Qing Empire and other non-Han groups under its rule.[11] The "new Qing history" that started in the 1990s has led to a substantial revision of the history of the Qing Empire in China and Inner Asia by reconsidering the Manchu's contribution and relationship to Chinese culture, therefore challenging the received wisdom of the Sino-centric model of Confucian cultural unity (Crossley 1999; Dunnell and Millward 2004; Elliot 2001; Rawski 1996). Although there is still a need for in-depth analysis of internal dynamics in the borderland regions, a few works (Atwill 2005; Giersch 2006; Herman 2007) have highlighted border transformation mechanisms, resistance movements, and identity processes and are starting to address the ethnic entanglements brought to the fore by Uradyn Bulag (2007), who stressed the marital, military, economic, and religious components of the Tibeto-Mongolian interface.

Tibetan studies have also begun to move away from views of a homogenous Tibet and a unitary history of the Tibetan people by exploring the diversity of Tibetan societies across the plateau. However, in spite of the recognition that premodern Tibet developed its own Buddhist civilizing mission at the frontier of the state (Samuel 1993; Goldstein 1998; Huber 2011), there is still a need to fully address the processes of Tibetanization that took place and to conceptualize the internal diversity that characterizes the Tibetan world and the related dynamics of ethnicity (Shneiderman 2007).

The invention of national "imagined communities" and their "geo-body" was made through a state-initiated process of defining centers and peripheries, limits and peoples (tribes or ethnic groups), imposing borders and boundaries on regions, peoples, or spaces that were previously borderless (Anderson 1991, Keyes 2002, Hostetler 2001; Perdue 2001; Winichakul 1994). As Alexander Gardner forcefully put it, "in the midst of a global race to define and thereby appropriate territory, a place without clearly delineated borders was a place at risk of cartographic erasure. Khams was one such place" (2009, 99).

Borderlands and Frontiers

Just as there are many Tibets and Chinas, there are many borderlands. Borderlands and frontiers are, in fact, hardly distinguishable in Chinese (both can be rendered as *bianjiang*).[12] To any scholar of East Asia, the frontier immediately evokes the figure of Owen Lattimore ([1940] 1967) and his

"inner Asian frontiers of China," as well as that of Edmund Leach (1960) and his "frontier of Burma." From Lattimore, we gather that frontiers are zones without boundaries where cultures meet and compete; from Leach, that the interdependent concepts of frontier, state, and nation and the concomitant "dogma of sovereignty" do not necessarily correspond to indigenous notions. To some extent, both scholars point to the necessity of acknowledging some key features of the premodern state and situations of statelessness.

The absence of clear borderlines characterizes many premodern societies before the (Western) territorial state came into existence, in Asian history just as in North American history (e.g., Adelman and Aron 1999; Hämäläinen and Truett 2011). For Michel Baud and Willem van Schendel (1997, 223), "borders appear to have been preceded by situations in which two or more *frontiers* tended to close into, and sometimes with, each other. We could label this the *embryonic borderland*. Of course, many frontier areas never became borderlands. Only afterward can we determine which frontier situations might be considered predecessors to formal borders."

Borderlands, whatever the definition we choose—and there are many—depend on the (ideal) existence of a border. The designation of Kham as a borderland is both appropriate and ambiguous, as the border between Central Tibet and China proper has been nonexistent for a long period, rather fuzzy and ineffective most of the time, or changing and moving at best. As Scott Relyea reminds us in this issue, the first "delimitation" of a border was a simple stele erected on a mountain pass (Bum la) in 1727. It was not until 1914 and the Simla Convention that an actual line was to be drawn on the map—although disagreements persisted about where it should be (McGranahan 2003; Jagou 2006).[13]

This process of territorialization did not unfold in a straightforward manner because imperial and national enterprises and the nature of the frontier changed over time (Crossley, Siu, and Sutton 2006, 20).[14] If the danger of the frontier narrative is to give a sense of historical closure by introducing the telos of the nation, recent alternative narratives often end up reproducing an earlier conceptualization of borderlands as discrete zones and substantive entities, inhabited by "borderland people." For this reason we need to be as critical about frontiers and borderlands as we are about ethnic boundaries (e.g., Barth 1969). To promote a more open-ended understanding, several authors successfully challenge the Sino-centric or Lhasa-

centric view of powerful centers and passive indigenous communities and make use of the "middle ground" metaphor developed by Richard White (1991) in the context of the North American frontier to emphasize the negotiations and accommodations that take place (Giersch 2006; Hayes 2014; Tenzin 2014; Tsomu 2009, 2015). Similarly, Gerald Roche has argued that the "hyphenated divide, usually some variant of Sino-Tibetan" is a misleadingly simplistic binary that depicts "the 'frontier' . . . as a fundamentally ethnic one" (2014, 1–2). "Sino-Tibetan," I would argue, should be understood as a civilizational rather than ethnic compound. Frontiers like borderlands exist in juxtaposition and in dialectics with centers of power. In the hyphen, we find the double patterns of inclusion and exclusion, assimilation and differentiation, that are typical of the frontier as an interethnic contact zone.[15] The hyphen enables us to recognize the linkage as much as the divide. In other words, it points to how, to varying degrees, the two worlds (Tibetan and Chinese) mingled, while the cultural and ethnic divide was maintained. Here I am reclaiming the "F word" precisely in its hyphenated version (e.g., Klein 1996).

Kham has been a frontier not only for China (that is, for the Yuan, Qing, and Republicans) but also for Central Tibet (that is, for the Ganden Phodrang). As such, it constituted, and still constitutes to some extent, a remote area that represented strategic political significance and economic potential for the distant centers, and became contested by social formations of unequal power.[16] I would argue, however, that borderlands and frontiers should not be seen as exclusive terms: they denote connected features of the place, two sides of its relational nature as a nexus of power.[17]

IN THIS ISSUE: WEALTH AND POWER IN THE KHAM BORDERLANDS

Frontiers and centers are, to some extent, interdependent, and each is a source of wealth for the other. The articles in this issue show how these sources of wealth were contested by often unequal forces, and how the centers sought to control or contain various forms of material power and trade flows (Booz, Relyea). The authors also show how the material basis of power was converted into symbolic power through religious or ritualized channels (Chaix, Gros), and how local institutions turned into hybrid formations in

order to maintain their power while adapting to changing economic conditions (Tsomu) as the overlapping spheres of authority in Kham increasingly led to competing claims over people, land, and resources. Economic development and extraction became intrinsically part of the Qing and later Republican frontier project. Similarly for Tibet, as Geoffrey Samuel rightly contended, "the primary focus of the whole enterprise [of central rule was] on the extraction of produce and the control of personnel" (1993, 65). As Jack Patrick Hayes argued more recently, much of the upheaval in the Kham borderlands, starting in the mid-nineteenth century, stemmed from recurring conflicts over control of the land and its resources (2014, xx). The in-migration of miners contributed to transforming local economies and ecologies, and the presence of Han settlers became an important element in local life and politics (see Tenzin, this issue).[18] The exploitation and control of resources certainly enjoyed a much longer history—consider salt, a much sought-after resource and a source of wealth, which was also a common currency of exchange throughout Yunnan and southern Tibet (see Gros 1996, 165–166; Wang 2011, 129; Coleman 2014, 249). More generally, mineral wealth and natural resources have long been a strong motivation behind Chinese state expansion, often in the preliminary form of tribute relations—merchants and entrepreneurs often insinuated themselves into such processes, and as Peter Perdue put it, "tribute discourse permitted extensive commercial exchange" (2005, 403). There were not only political but also economic advantages in paying tribute. As Yudru Tsomu noted about the Chakla kingdom in Dartsedo, "gifts bestowed by the emperor in return for the tribute greatly exceeded the value of the tribute, and the tribute missions were also great opportunities . . . to engage in trade" (2009, 75).

Several authors have shown in great detail how military operations became a channel for reforms and merchants' involvement. After the Qing state reformed the corvée system, it configured a new system of paid labor that, for example, became vital for the logistics and organization of the massive military labor force that was mobilized especially during the second Jinchuan campaign (Dai 2001; Theobald 2013). The Qing state turned to merchants for help in funding its frontier campaigns, and commercial activities flourished, with businesses being set up in the trading town of Dartsedo (Dajianlu, Kangding). What started to change as the Qing began a more systematic exploitation of ore, as Giersch (2014) has argued, is that

it involved private entrepreneurs and was conducted on a totally different scale. Infrastructures became even more crucial, as were sources of revenue and the need to rely on, and reform, the corvée system for transportation (e.g., Lawson 2013).[19]

In Kham, where significant wealth came from trade, the broadening of business networks as well as the growing demand for certain goods (wool, musk, and medicinal products, among others) embedded commercial activities in larger forces of change, at regional, national, and global levels (Giersch 2010). In the process, new opportunities arose for some people to play leading political and economic roles, and we see the emergence of "merchants" as significant power brokers in the region. A Marxist reading would be that power relations revolve, in the last analysis, around the control of real goods and sources, as well as relations, of production. In other words, sociopolitical changes are often related to possibilities of access and control of resources, which in turn impact the hierarchies of wealth and power. While this may be so, the papers in this issue reveal a multitude of fundamental approaches to understanding the impact of control over material sources of wealth. From the Qing's building of roads and bridges, to local regimes (such as Chakla) and their adaptations to an increase in commerce, to indigenous (Drung) notions of wealth and power, these studies provide what others often lack: an inquiry into indigenous notions of wealth and power, which need to be articulated alongside empire-centered and nation-centered narratives.

Through the centuries, despite the "friction of terrain" (Scott 2009) limiting the integration of the borderlands by neighboring centers, such regions have been zones of the circulation of goods, ideas, and people alike, as well as places of confrontation. Their inhabitants were involved in evolving and long-standing networks of economic partnership and in diverse religious or political relations. Caravan routes linking Sichuan and Yunnan to Tibet, India, and mainland Southeast Asia have a long history, and there is now solid evidence of the contribution of long-distance trade to shaping these regions (Hill 1998; van Spengen 2000; Yang 2004; Chang 2009; Giersch 2006, 2010, 2011). In this issue, Patrick Booz demonstrates that the barrier-like mountains that stand beyond the Sichuan Basin to the west have long been climbed and crossed via multiple passes that lead to Tibetan heights and constituted the main arteries of the large-scale tea trade. These economic

movements have largely contributed to the strategic importance of Kham, just as they have to its economic and demographic boom.

Historical studies conducted in China on the highly publicized "ancient tea-horse roads" (Ch. *chama gudao*) have uncovered their importance and highlighted their role in structuring relations among eastern Tibet, Sichuan, Yunnan, and beyond. Booz investigates the trade routes in the western Sichuan borderlands that allowed for contact and trade between the Chinese counties and Eastern Tibet. Many routes eventually reached the towns of Dartsedo and Zungchu (Songpan) farther north, and some provided the vital mode of access to Tibet. Key to the economic development of the region and to its increasing political integration was the infrastructure: as Booz tells us in this issue, the building of "officials' roads" (*guandao*) that would facilitate these economic flows was promoted just as much out of geopolitical and military concerns as out of trade opportunism.

Bricks of "border tea" (*biancha*) produced in the factories of Yazhou (today's Ya'an) were one of the major trade items and a primary currency of exchange across Kham. Rémi Chaix demonstrates in this issue that it was also used as a kind of currency of account. Chaix's detailed inquiry into aspects of the economic history of the Kingdom of Dergé contributes an unprecedented analysis of the cost of labor and of the remuneration system and its scale in the eighteenth century. He takes the example of construction and decorative work performed for the Dergé Printing House—one of the most important in the Tibetan world—that mobilized numerous artisans for paid labor. He shows that, in Kham, tea and barley were taken as a reference value to estimate the wages, providing evidence that labor was highly commodified in Eastern Tibet and that the tea trade had been a key structuring element of the local economy. In the nineteenth century, trade obviously contributed to the wealth that boosted cultural activities and "a virtual cultural renaissance in Kham" (Kapstein 2006, 165) that was centered on the principality of Dergé.

The constant movement of merchants and porters, who traveled back and forth between the Chengdu plain and Dartsedo carrying tea and other goods, promoted the local economy and the emergence of inns along the roads (Dai 2001, 79). Dartsedo was the door to Tibet and, for many people, it represented the border.[20] Booz locates Dartsedo within the larger networks of roads that crisscrossed this region as it became one of the principal nodes

of the tea trade in particular and developed as a main site of distribution and commercial activity. In this issue, Yudru Tsomu provides a detailed sketch of the history of Dartsedo in relation to the economic activities that triggered its development as a major trading town. She contributes the first in-depth description and analysis of the role of trading houses (Ch. *guozhuang*, Tib. *achak khapa*) of the border town of Dartsedo. These trading houses served not only as warehouses for the enormous quantities of tea and other goods reaching the town, but also as inns and places where trade relations and networks developed between Tibetan and Chinese merchants. Innkeepers were crucial cultural brokers and facilitators of transactions, and Tsomu provides an important perspective into the workings of "deal making," which, as she shows, was a skill that the women who ran trading houses were known for. This gendered aspect of trade emerged in relation to the transformation of the trading houses that were originally part of the local administrative structure of the Chakla kingdom.[21] As Tsomu explains, when the *guozhuang* primarily functioned as an administrative system, they were managed by men who mainly dealt with the affairs of the state and politics, including receiving tribute-bearing Tibetan dignitaries and Chinese officials. Then, "women came to dominate the *guozhuang* sector because it was mostly likened to managing a household"—as opposed to male-dominated long-distance trade—and therefore viewed as lower-status work. However, as key actors of a very profitable business, these women contributed significantly to their families' wealth.

Kham developed steadily as an economic powerhouse, and trade brought numerous Tibetans, Chinese, Hui, and Westerners into Kham. As Carole McGranahan (2002) has shown, this trade raised certain local families to high levels of power in the Tibetan central government. Similarly, Tsomu's contribution helps us to see that, beyond the state and its economic impact, the economic activity and related changes in social dynamics, as well as the role of trade in triggering structural change, depended on local initiatives and were shaped by internal dynamics as much as outside factors.

The larger picture provided by Scott Relyea in this issue precisely demonstrates how crucial it became—from China's perspective—to limit and control these forms of accommodation in order to exert its authority. Bringing the discussion back to the confrontational history for hegemony over Kham in the late Qing and early Republican eras, Relyea describes the

efforts to regulate economic activities, especially the border tea trade that was foundational to what he rightly calls "Kham's monastery-centered tea brick economy." Relyea's analysis of Sichuan officials' territorial claims over Kham demonstrates the importance of a new conception of sovereignty from which there derived attempts to make the border a tangible barrier to both spiritual and economic influences from Lhasa. To assert commercial authority in Kham and to engulf the economic flows within the Chinese realm was also a means of challenging the monasteries' influence and local authority. Until the early twentieth century, politics and territory did not link the Tibetan state together in the manner required by newly hegemonic nineteenth-century European models of the nation-state (McGranahan 2003). As Relyea demonstrates in this issue, the modern belief that hard boundaries were necessary to determine where one country ended and another began became a leitmotiv of the sovereignty rhetoric that deeply and irremediably affected the status of Kham.

As described above, prior to the twentieth century, the spheres of influence over Kham had not formed a clearly delimited territory with traceable borders. Kham's regional centers of power varied over time, and they shifted between periods of attachment to one distant center or another and periods of autonomy.[22] There was a wide variety of situations, and local hereditary headmen often enjoyed a great degree of autonomy and wielded considerable local authority, even when these regions came nominally under external rule. In these more remote areas, indirect Chinese administration (that of the "indigenous chieftains" within the so-called *tusi* system), as well as premodern Tibetan administrative systems (that of the Ganden Phodrang, monastic institutions, or hereditary rulers), granted considerable latitude to their representatives. In my own contribution to this special issue on the question of political legitimacy in the context of interethnic relations in the southernmost part of Kham, at the border with Yunnan, I highlight the role of usury and debt dependency in particular. Pockets of ethnically diverse communities located at the margins of Kham's archipelago of more centralized polities were loosely incorporated. I show that it was often through trade that this process of incorporation took place; further, incorporation chiefly meant economic dependence, which turned into political domination, especially for the marginalized Tibeto-Burman groups such as the Drung and Nung whom I study. It has often been reported that, in the Tibetan world,

as monasteries accumulated significant holdings of land and became important centers of power that competed with the hereditary rulers, they became actively involved in long-distance trade and financial activities such as usury. I demonstrate that the Drungs' political dependency arose from trading with and accepting loans from commercial agents and from intermediaries of local power holders, whether Tibetan or Naxi. Local agents and headmen often used their position and semi-independent authority to derive private profit from commercial activities and use the corvée system for their own benefit. In the far eastern Himalayas, where, as Toni Huber has similarly shown, Tibetan agents "cannot be simply equated with the Ganden Phodrang state, regardless of whether or not they were serving officers of that state" (2011, 269), they locally had considerable leeway to operate according to their own will and often exploited the local population.

Here, the historical perspective on power relations becomes embedded in the contemporary "memory work" of the communities under scrutiny. Tenzin Jinba and I both follow a bottom-up approach that relies on actively searching outside the archives for the spoken words of those who remember events and can speak about a past that is still relevant to their present. They remind us that the use of oral literature and locally produced written documentation is a central means by which a community forms and maintains its identity (see Tsomu, this issue; see also Schwieger 2002, 135). Tenzin takes us to the northern part of Kham, to the Gyarong region that was the battleground of the Jinchuan wars. He focuses his ethnohistorical study on an uprising that took place in the early twentieth century during the critical transitional period from the Qing to the Republic, and was embedded in sociopolitical changes and emerging ethnic and religious tensions. Gyarong is a particular region in terms of its relationships with both Tibet and China: the memory of the Jinchuan campaigns and of the glorious past of the Gyarong independent polities exemplifies how the blurred categories of identity and belonging are mobilized and how they resurfaced on the occasion of this uprising. It seems an exemplary case of the discontinuities of inclusion patterns, from both Tibetan and Chinese sides, and how locals pursue their own agendas.

All the studies presented here give us a better sense not only of the complexities of Kham but also of the ambivalent positioning inherent to such

contested space in relation to shifting boundaries of authority. They each provide a sense of the interpenetration of the multiple scales that inform the actors' agency and shape the social and economic processes at play. Giersch aptly shows in his afterword that the patterns of power and authority in Kham evolved alongside economic transformations and expanding networks of trade. Furthermore, he demonstrates how the contributions to this issue, set against the "combined methodologies of borderlands studies and scale" allow us to make sense of Kham for a comparative history of borderlands and expansive regimes.

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NOTES

1. The research program "Territories, Communities and Exchanges in the Sino-Tibetan Kham Borderlands (China)" (http://kham.cnrs.fr) received funding from the European Research Council (ERC), Support for Frontier Research (SP2-Ideas), and Starting grant No. 283870 (PI: Stéphane Gros). Contributors to this special issue discussed their respective papers during a two-day workshop in Saint-Germain-en-Laye in May 2015, in which Katia Buffetrille, Fabienne Jagou, Lara Maconi, Kunsang Namgyal-Lama, Gerald Roche, and Maria Turek also participated.
2. For the Tibetan world, the earliest contributions to the study of trade and commercial activities are Boulnois (1983) and van Spengen (2000). They each point to the constitutive importance of trade for Tibetans—which makes the remark by Yudru Tsomu (this issue) that there is still resistance to considering trade part of Tibetan culture even more salient. Trade, with pastoralism and agriculture, is one of Tibet's three principal occupations (Kapstein 2006).
3. Local imaginings and representations of space, and the daily experience of liv-

ing in this space, contrast starkly with how this same space is perceived from the outside, in the eyes of those who do not share an intimate relationship with the terrain (Tsomu 2013; Maconi 2014). Mueggler (2011) offers one of the most provocative contributions to our understanding of how space and geography were perceived in northwest Yunnan by different actors.

4. An approximate estimate is that nearly 40 percent of all Tibetans in the People's Republic of China live in Kham.
5. Earlier authors have shown occasional interest in various aspects of Kham, comparing regional entities throughout Tibet (Samuel 1993; Marshall and Cooke 1997), compiling secondary sources, or offering an overview of local cultural diversity in the contemporary context (Gruschke 2004a and 2004b; Kolås and Thowsend 2005). Kham has also been known for its image forged around its population's warrior spirit and resistance to Chinese government control (see Andrugtsang 1973; McGranahan 2006). Gardner (2003) provides a survey of earlier scholarship on Kham from the perspective of religious history. For a recent overview of scholarship about Kham in particular, see the introduction in Tsomu (2015, xvii–xxiii).
6. It seems that we have now made some progress since Geoffrey Samuel made the remark that "Tibetanist and Sinologist accounts of Khams (or 'Western Sichuan') in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for example, seem scarcely to be talking about the same place" ([1994] 2005, 195).
7. For a recent and concise overview of Tibetan history, see Kapstein (2006). See also Tsomu (2015, 21–23) about the fifth Dalai Lama's attempts to exercise control over Kham.
8. However, religious diversity and the presence of other schools of Buddhism—or, for that matter, resistance to the Geluk school—notably in some of the most important polities of Chakla, Nangchen and Dergé, remained tangible signs of the limits of religious centralization attempts in Kham. There was also resistance to the Geluk further south in Yunnan (Gyelthang).
9. About the Zunghar involvement, see Perdue (2005, 227–249).
10. Tuttle (2007) makes an important contribution to the reconsideration of the Sino-Tibetan interface on Tibetan terms, by underlining the role that Buddhism played in China's transition to a nation-state, making the Chinese nationalist narrative not purely secular. On the role of Buddhism during the national construction of the republican period, see also Bulag (2007, 33–40).
11. There is now extensive literature, including Bulag (2002), Lipman (1997), Harrell (1995b), and Hostetler (2001), among others.
12. However, there exists a variety of terms around the notions of frontier and bor-

der in the Chinese language (Calanca and Wildt 2006; see also Lary 2007, 5). Borders are intrinsically polysemic in character, as they do not exist in the same way for individuals belonging to different social groups (Balibar 2002, 79).

13. For these border issues, see in particular Teichman (1922). Jagou (2006) has emphasized how Sino-Tibetan tensions in Kham leading up to and after the Simla Convention ended not in the drawing of a linear border but in the recognition of a "frontier zone" that later grew into Xikang Province. In this specific case, the non-delimited border inflated from a demarcating and dividing line into a whole region.
14. Crossley, Siu, and Sutton (2006, 3, 17) chiefly make use of the term *frontier*, but the authors escape the dilemma by also referring to these "plastic intermediate zones" as "margins."
15. Ethnic formations are also generated in relation to processes of political and cultural dominance; they are not the starting point. For a discussion about what I have called interethnicity in these borderlands, see Gros (2014a). It is, as Roche (2014) argues, a bias of Western scholarship to assume that ethnic referents are a given, which are often seen as immutable or displaying a historical continuity. Indeed, one of the claims—and results—of civilizational processes of expansion is to make "culture" spread across ethnic boundaries.
16. While such a clarification, for the purpose of this introduction, distinguishes the frontier from the borderlands, it comes very close to William Zartman's definition of the borderland: "Borderlands are inhabited territories located on the margins of a power center, or between power centers, with *power* understood in the civilizational as well as the politico-economic sense.... Borderlands need to be understood, not as places or even events, but as social processes" (2010, 2).
17. See also Huber (2011), Relyea (2015a), van Spengen (2002, 9, 22), and Tsomu (2015, 2, 21). Van Spengen and Jabb highlighted the fact that the "autonomous territorial quality" of Kham "undermines the conventional twin-concept of centre and periphery" (2009, 8).
18. For how conflicts over mining rights turned into a major rebellion in Yunnan in the mid-nineteenth century, see Atwill (2005).
19. In Kham, the courier station system initially exclusively reserved for the government was opened to merchants and travelers during the reforms of the "new administration" (*xinzheng*) at the end of Qing dynasty, between 1901 and 1911. According to Zhao Erfeng's plan, one high-standard guesthouse and four inns were to be built along the road from Dartsedo to Chamdo for the benefit of merchants and travelers (Lu 2013; also Coleman 2014, 300, 305). Here we are

reminded that in Xinjiang, for example, merchants were allowed to use the post-road system (different kinds of relay stations), which provided logistical support for their caravans (Millward 1998).

20. Sperling (1988) is one of the earlier contributors where the important subject of trade is addressed. He examines the early Ming dynasty transformation of the little village of Dartsedo into a center of the Sino-Tibetan tea and horse trade. Tsomu mentions that, even today, "the Chinese still refer to travel beyond Dartsendo as 'going beyond the pass' (*dao guanwai qu*), implying that the other side of the mountain is a totally different world" (2015, 3).
21. For details about the history of the Chakla Kingdom, see Tsomu (2009).
22. For a concise view of the diversity of political systems in Kham, see Samuel (1993, ch. 4) and Tsomu (2015, 6–11).

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