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# A Chinese Imperial Decree and the Yangton Lama of Dolpo<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction of the decree

This paper deals with one of the important decrees preserved in the Samling monastery in Dolpo. Dolpo is located at the northwestern part of Nepal and to the south of Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). It is culturally Tibetan area situated between Mustang District in the east and Mugu District in the west. The Samling monastery (founded in 13th century) is one of the oldest and main Bonpo monastery in Dolpo.

The decree is mainly written in Tibetan scripts and two lines in Chinese appear downward on the both left and right sides of the content.<sup>2</sup>

The document is stamped twice with a Chinese seal, once at the end of the Tibetan text and the other on the left line in Chinese.

In Dolpo it is known as “A decree of Chinese Emperor” (Tib. *rgya nag gong ma'i bka' shog*). As it is mentioned in the decree, it was issued by a person with a title Dhaloyer (*Bdā lo yer*) from Shigatse at the order of the Chinese Emperor Jiaqing (reigned from 1796–1820).<sup>3</sup>

The decree is written in fine Tibetan cursive handwriting (*'khyugs yig*) but there are 31 spelling errors out of 253 words in total.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented on 3<sup>rd</sup> International Seminar of Young Tibetologists (ISYT), Kobe, Japan on September 5, 2012. I express my heartfelt thanks to my supervisor Daniel Berounsky and my friend Kalsang Norbu Gurung for their corrections and suggestions, Penghao Sun for typing the Chinese characters and Martin Slobodnik for translating the Chinese inscriptions of the decree. Probably the first foreigner to reach Dolpo was a Japanese monk Ekai Kawaguchi. He visited Dolpo on his way to Tibet in 1900. A century later, I, as a Dolpo monk, was fortunate to present this paper in Japan. Thanks for my friend Seiji Kumagai who made this financially possible.

<sup>2</sup> The left inscription gives the date of the issue of the decree and is discussed later in the paper. The right inscription is rather problematic; some of its characters are not understandable. It is not discussed in the paper, because it does not seem to add some substantial information. It reads: 統領後藏江定等汎官兵都闡府王.

<sup>3</sup> The end of his reign is given sometimes as 1820 and sometimes as 1821. See Peterson 2002: 395; Fairbank 1978: 180.

<sup>4</sup> For the corrections given in the square brackets see the transliteration of the decree in the following note.

## Content of the decree

Through this decree, the people of Dolpo (in particular officials, clergy and laypeople of the neighboring areas) were ordered to support the monasteries related to the Yangton Lamas, namely, Samling, Gollang and Tarap monasteries, and to protect the properties of these monasteries including religious items and artifacts, livestock and fields. It is also recorded in the decree that the Yangton Lamas of Dolpo must be given the pasture rights to feed their livestock in Droshoe, Tibet, as they pay the price for the pasture field. Furthermore, according to the decree, the authority warns against the levying of additional taxes, selling goods of poor quality at exorbitant prices, and the use of clergy as common laborers in place of laborers from the general population.

## Translation of the decree<sup>5</sup>

Upon the order of the Great Sovereign Emperor [of China], the heavenly appointed Manjushree, [I,] the Dhaloyer (*bdā lo yer*) of Zhikatse, issues this decree for [the following] purposes;

All classes of superior and inferior people [such as] monks and lay people, elders and officials, messengers, government envoys, emissaries and others of the region of Upper and Lower Mustang, *Khri thogs pa*, Droshoe, Mon of Nepal and Dolpo must know that:

Every existing monastery [in which] The Great Lama Yangton himself has been making great endeavor, with deep concern towards service for the stability of life of the Great Emperor [of China] and the Dalai Lama [and his] spiritual sons, and [for the] happiness and well-being of the Tibetan subject people;

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<sup>5</sup> The number mark the line of the text, the corrected reading is given in the square brackets: (1) *gnam bkod* [bskos] 'jam dpal dbyangs 7 gong ma bdag po chen pos bka' mngags gzhis rtse bda' lo yer nas (2) *bka' shog sbyin don/ blo* [glo] stod smad/ khri thogs pa/ gro shod/ bal mon/ rdol po yul (3) *gyi ser skya/ rgan po las sne/ pho nya/ sku tshab/ bang chen sogs/ mi sna drag gzhān* [zhan] (4) *thams cad nas nges dgos/ bla ma yang rton* [ston] chen po 'di nyid nas 7 gong ma chen po dang/ rgyal dbang yab sras(5) *kyi zhabs bstan* [brtan] dang/ bod 'bangs bde skyid la thugs *skyed* [bskyed] lhur len du bzhugs pa'i dgon khag so so dang/ thag par (6) *bsam gling/ gol lang/ rta rab rnam kyī bla gra* [grwa] tshang ma bstan pa nam gnas bar du lha khang nang *brten* [rten]/ sku dang (7) *brten* [rten] gsum/ lha cha mnga *bshangs* [gshang]/ sbub *bcāl* [chol]/ *gting* [ting] shags sogs *gi* [kyi] 'tshon [mishon] pas nang *brten* [rten] dang/ phyi nor (8) *sa zhing/ dud* 'gro sogs yod rigs la rtswa bza' chu *mithung* ['thung] sngar rgyun ci dang/ gro shod khul *rtsa* [rtswa] rigs la (9) *yang rtsa* [rtswa] rin sngar rgyun sprad phyin bkag 'geg [gegs] mi byed pas 'tshon [mishon]/ bza' 'dod kyi 'bam tshong spus *rgyur* [sgyur]/ dod (10) 'u lag/ khral rigs gsar 'gel sogs bsnyad gtser du 'gro ba khyod gong 'khod drag *gzhān* [zhan] su thad nas (11) spu *rtsam* [tsam] byas pa shar tsho/ *brtsad dpvod* [rtsad gcod] thog rgyal khrims *kyi* [kyis] *brjes bsnon* [rjes gnon] giong nges yin pas/ de ltar mi (12) dgos pa'i sngar rgyun ji yod la *gsor* [sor] gnas rgyun *khyongs* ['khyongs] su dgos *rgyur/ de'i 'ched* [ched] bca' chin khri bzhugs (13) bcu dgu pa'i zla tshes la//

particularly Samling [of Bijer], Gollang [of Tsharkha] and [Sibchog] of Tarab with all their lamas and monks, with their temples;

“religious supports” as statues and triple supports [of body, speech and mind of Buddha];

religious instruments [such as] drum, flat-bell, cymbal, Tingshag and others which represent religious items;

worldly wealth [such as] farmlands, domestic animals, etc., and all that belongs to it, [i.e.] pasturelands and water;

[all of it should remain according to] previous conventions up to the time when the Doctrine will prevail.

Also, in the case of the pastures of the Droshoe area; if the price for the pastureland is paid as usual [by the monasteries], they are should not be prevented [from grazing there].

Similarly to this case, if whoever of you, whether superior or inferior as mentioned above, would even in the slightest appear to be compelling [them] to buy inferior goods at exorbitant prices, exchanging useless things for those of good quality by greed, substituting [clergy for] corvee labour, levying new taxes [on them] and so on, that it would become intimidating and vexing [to them],

[In such cases] we will pursue you by royal law through detection. To avoid that, it is necessary to maintain past conventions in continuity and to leave them unchanged.

[It has been written] for these purposes,  
dated in the 19<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Jiaqing.

### Dating of the decree

The issue date of the decree as written at the end of the Tibetan text is: “[It has been written] for these purposes, dated in the 19<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Jiaqing.”<sup>6</sup> The Chinese text on the left margin of the decree mentions the date more precisely. It gives the date as (嘉慶十九年八月初三日) “3rd day of the 8th month of the 19th year of the Jiaqing period.”

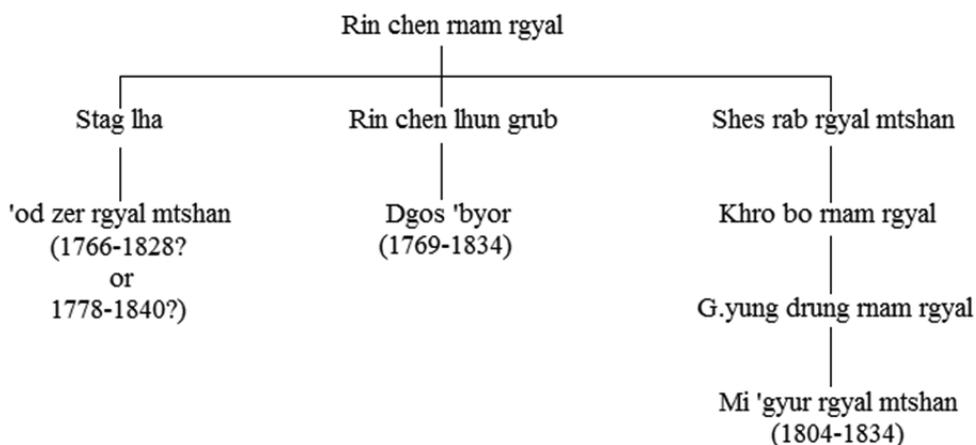
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<sup>6</sup> See the decree; “*de'i 'ched [ched] bca' chin khri bzhugs bcu dgu pa'i zla tshes la//*”

Since the Emperor Jiaqing started his reign on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1796, and doing the proper calculation of the 8<sup>th</sup> month of the 19<sup>th</sup> year from the start of his reign period, the best guess regarding the issue date of this decree is October 1814.

### Who requested the decree?

According to the oral history of Dolpo, Yangton Woser Gyaltzen requested and received this decree from Tibet. He is thus mentioned as an informant of the Chinese emperor in a recent text based on oral tradition.<sup>7</sup>



According to the Genealogy of Yangton Lamas (*Ya-ngal Dhungrab*), Yangton Woser Gyaltzen, also known as Sithar Namgyal<sup>8</sup> died in the year of rat and at the age of sixty three.<sup>9</sup> However, there is no specific name of the element of that rat year, and therefore it is difficult to figure out its equivalent western year. Fortunately, we have very reliable date of his cousin,<sup>10</sup> named Goejor (1769-1834).<sup>11</sup> Since the

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Kind 2012: 197.

<sup>8</sup> See Yang sgom mi 'gyur rgyal mtshan 2005: 72: *sri thar nam rgyal 'khor ba la zhen pa log nas rab tu byung ba'i tshul ming stod smad kun tu dbyar rnga ltar (sgrog) [grags] pa'i stag lha'i thugs sprul yang ston 'od zer rgyal mtshan/* (Sithar Namgyal became repulsed by samsāra and became a monk. His ordination name, which was spread resounding as summer thunder in all upper and lower [parts of the country,] was Yangton Woser Gyaltzen; the mind-emanation of [the deity] Takla.)

<sup>9</sup> See Yang sgom mi 'gyur rgyal mtshan 2005: 72: *mtha' mar sku tshe yang re gsum la byi lo hor zla bzhi pa'i tshes brgyad la 'das.* (Finally, he passed away on eighth day [and] fourth month of the Year of the Rat at the age of sixty three.)

<sup>10</sup> See Yang sgom mi 'gyur rgyal mtshan 2005: 71: *yang ston rin chen rgyal mtshan dang/ mkhan drung ma dpal 'dzoms gnyis la sras bzhi/ sras che ba gshen tshad med 'od ldan gyi sprul pa yang ston g.yung drung nam rgyal/.* (Yangton Rinchen Gyaltzen and Khendrungma Palzom, the two, had four sons. The eldest son was Yangton Yungdrung Namgyal, the 'miraculous manifestation' of Shen Tseme Wodhen.) *de 'og bla ma stag lha/ de 'og rin chen lhun grub/.* (After him was Lama Takla. After him was Rinchen Lhundup.): 72: *chung ba shes rab rgyal mtshan/.* (Youngest [son] was Sherab Gyaltzen.) *yang ston stag lha dang/ sa rgya ma yum bu dgos 'dzoms las kyi mkha' 'gro ma de gnyis la sras ming sring gsum/ yang ston sri thar nam rgyal dang bla ma rin chen/.* (Yangton

decree was issued in 1814, the possibilities for the rat year of Woser Gyaltzen passing away would be 1816, 1828, 1840 and 1852. The first and last possibilities would make the gap between the two cousins almost 20 years, which is possible, but not quite common. With the higher probability he passed away either in 1828, or 1840. This means that he was 49 or 37 years old when the decree was issued. Therefore, the Yangton Lama who requested this decree was with the highest probability none other than Yangton Lama Woser Gyaltzen. He was renowned and he made significant contributions to Yangton family during that time.

### WHO ISSUED THE DECREE?

In Dolpo this decree is known as “A decree of the Chinese Emperor” but what is mentioned in the decree itself is as follows: “Upon the order of the Great Sovereign Emperor [of China], the heavenly appointed Manjushree, [I,] the Dhaloyer (*bdā lo yer*) of Zhikatse, issue this decree for [following] purposes.”<sup>12</sup>

The decree therefore was issued by Dhaloyer (*Bdā lo yer*), a Chinese Brigade vice-commander of the garrison in Tsang (*gtsang*) as it is written in the Chinese seal as “Seal of the Brigade Vice Commander of the Hou Zang /gTsang Garrison/” (駐防後藏都司鈴記).<sup>13</sup>

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Takla and [his] “secret consort” Sagyama Yumbu Goezom, the two, had three children, brothers and sister. [Two sons were] Yangton Sithar Namgyal and Lama Rinchen.): 73: *ston rin chen dang/ yum bom mchog gnyis la sras lcām (sring) [dral] bzhi/ gcen po dgos 'byor/*. (Yangton Rinchen and his wife Bomchog, the two, had four children, brothers and sister. Eldest was Goejor.)

<sup>11</sup> According to Genealogy, Ya-ngal Dhunrab, Goejor died in the year of the Wood-Horse. See Yang sgom mi 'gyur rgyal mtshan 2005: 74: “*mthar dgung lo re drug nas shing rta zla ba gsum pa'i tshes bcu la 'ja' 'od gur khang me tog gi char pa la sogs ngo mtshar du ma dang bcas te bon nyid dbyings su gshegs so//*.” (Finally he departed into the ‘space of ultimate nature’ at the age of sixty six on full-moon day of third month of the Wood-Horse [year], accompanied by many wondrous such as rain of flowers and dome of rainbow-light.) This Wood-Horse is also the year of the death of Migyur Gyaltzen. See Yang sgom mi 'gyur rgyal mtshan 2005: 75: “*bar pa mi 'gyur rgyal mtshan..... bar chad dbang gis sku tshes mthar ma phyin par dgung lo so gcig nas shing rta zla ba gsum pa'i tshes bcu bdun la dgongs pa bon nyid dbyings su gshegs so//*” (Middle [son] Migyur Gyaltzen..... Due to the obstructions he did not reach the limit of his life-span and his thought passed into ‘space of ultimate nature’ in the age of thirty one on seventeenth day [and] third month of Wood-horse [year].) There is no doubt that the year of Wood-Horse is equivalent to the western year 1834, See Choekhortshang 2011: 49: “Migyur Gyaltzen died in the wood-horse year 1834” Since Goejor lived 66 years and died in 1834, we can clearly confirm that he was born in 1769.

<sup>12</sup> See the decree “*gnam bkod [bskos] 'jam dpal dbyangs 7 gong ma bdag po chen pos bka' mngags gzhis rtse bda' lo yer nas bka' shog sbyin don//*”

<sup>13</sup> See the decree, the translation of *dusi* 都司 as Brigade Vice Commander is said to be synonym of 都閘 /dukun/ and follows the Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China (see Hucker 1985). I am grateful to M. Slobodnik for translating the seal.

On a similar seal, used by the Garrison commander of Lhasa in 1842, the 22<sup>nd</sup> year of the reign of Daoguang,<sup>14</sup> for a petition of recommending men to serve at various government posts, a term similar to Dhaloyer appears in a slightly different spelling as Dhaloyei. However, Dhaloyei seems to be a post title as are both Ho Dhaloyei (*ho brdā lo ye'i*) and Ying Dhaloyei (*ho brdā lo ye'i*),<sup>15</sup> which are mentioned as well in that petition. The title Dhaloyer could be “大老爺”<sup>16</sup> but further research for accurate interpretation is needed.

So this decree wasn't issued by Emperor Jiaqing, but rather issued by the Tsang based Dhaloyer on the order of the Emperor. If it had been issued directly by the Emperor Jiaqing then his official Tibetan name “*bsngags-'os smon-can*” marked with his official seal,<sup>17</sup> as always, would have appeared on the document.

## CONCLUSION

The decree was thus issued to protect Yangton Lama's monasteries, i.e. Samling, Sibchog and Gollang. A few recent information<sup>18</sup> names Drolung monastery instead of the Gollang one. But this is clearly erroneous.<sup>19</sup>

Generally, Yangton Lamas had been seeking support and decree from other officials such as the kings of Mustang,<sup>20</sup> Jumla and Gyalrong. Specifically King of

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<sup>14</sup> See Sgrolkar 1995, No 62a: “[Summary: In the 8<sup>th</sup> month of the 22<sup>nd</sup> year of Daoguang (1842), the commander of the Han-Tibetan battalion garrisoning Lhasa submitted a petition recommending men to serve as government ministers, *dapons*, *rupons*, *dzongpons* and *gyapons* who were to set out for Lasing. His Majesty the Emperor then issued a decree giving them promotions, conferring on them titles which were to be inherited by their descendants, and granting them the honour of wearing peacock feathers in recognition of their brave service.] Preserved by the Archives of the Tibet Autonomous Region.”

<sup>15</sup> See Sgrolkar 1995, No 62b: “*lha ldan rgya bod dmag sgar shu sbi ho brdA lo ye'i nas gral thon pa/ gong ma 'khri bzhugs nyi shu rtsa gnyis pa'i zla 8 tshes 18 nyin am pA lhan rgyas nas ying brdA lo ye'i la gral phebs pa/ gong ma 'khri bzhugs nyi shu rtsa nyis pa'i zla 8 tshes 20 la spyi khyab ying brdA lo ye'i nas gral phebs pa/ am pA lhan rgyas nas gral phebs don 'di gong ma 'khri bzhugs nyi shu rtsa gnyis pa'i zla 8 tshes 22 la gong ma chen po nas/*”

<sup>16</sup> Thanks for Iwata Keisuke for searching Dhaloyer's meaning.

<sup>17</sup> See Sgrolkar 1995, No 57-4.

<sup>18</sup> See Kind 2012: 197 and See Mathes 1997: 8. Also see link; ([http://www.uni-hamburg.de/ngmcp/gallerie/ngmcp\\_e.html](http://www.uni-hamburg.de/ngmcp/gallerie/ngmcp_e.html)); “A document written in Tibetan and Chinese. The Samling Gompa possesses numerous historical documents, nearly all of which were filmed by the NGMPP in the summer of 1997. Among them are two documents written in both Tibetan and Chinese. In the document shown here, a certain bDa lo yer from Shigatse, on the order of the Chinese Emperor Chia ch'ing (1796–1820), orders the King of Mustang and others to protect the possessions of the Samling, Drolung and Tarap monasteries”

<sup>19</sup> These two are different monasteries in two different regions and Drolung is not even a Bon monastery. Since the decree has clearly stated that “every existing monastery [in which] The Great Lama Yangton himself has been making great endeavor”, those mentioned monasteries should be related to Yangton Lamas. Gollang monastery unfortunately lies in ruins now, but this decree demonstrates that in 1814 it was a fully functioning monastery.

<sup>20</sup> Mustang Kings Tashi Nyingpo and Chimed Phendhey Nyingpo issued a decree to Yangton Lamas in 1802 that is similar in content to this Chinese decree. See Mustang Kings Decree-I 1802, “*shri a haM stobs kyī mnga' bdag*

Gyalrong, Sakyong Kunga Razi issued a decree in 1757 addressed to Yangton Lama, and mentioned in it if necessary they will apply for support from Chinese emperor to protect the Yangton Lamas.<sup>21</sup>

The decree issued by Chinese Brigade vice-commander of the garrison in Tsang studied here is a witness of the troubles the Yangton Lama's monasteries were facing by the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Dolpo. It was the time after Tibetan-Nepalese war of 1788-1792.<sup>22</sup> The Gurkhas of Nepal were pacified only with the help of Chinese army. The decree confirms that the Chinese officials were still involved in this wider region in 1814. One can hypothetically assume that with the pacification of Gurkhas by Chinese, their power in the region of Dolpo and surrounding areas of Mustang, Jumla, etc., was weakened. This vacuum gave opportunity to the smaller local rulers to impose taxes in Dolpo and the decree studied here could be seen as a means of protection from it. The question arises why Yangton Lama requested Chinese emperor. Besides some power, which the Chinese were still executing in this region, it is also possible that it was facilitated by kings of Gyalrong, who had good relationship both with Yangton Lamas and Chinese emperor.

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*rgyal po bkra' shis snying po dang 'chi med phan bde'i snying po mched kyi bka'// dol gru bzhi'i sgru dpon las byed gser skya brag gzhān mtshangs mar nges dgos/ bla ma yang ston pa'i dgon pa der snga khyun yang phral gyi rigs spu tsam med pa'i khyun yod pa/ da gos kyi char yang ji srid rgyal bstan nam gnas kyi bar du dgon der gong 'khod gser skya brag gzhān mtshangs mas phral 'gel smos ci brnyad 'tshes lab rigs spu tsam med pa mtshangs mas nges pa bgyis// zhes go bar byed pa'i yi ge chu khyi sgro bzhin zla ba'i tshes 4 dbe'bar rgyal khab pho sbrang chen po smon thang rtse nas bris pa dza yan tu//'* Their successor Jampal Dradhul also issued another decree to Yangton Lama of Samling in 1836 (see Mustang Decree-II 1836.) for the resolution of problems concerning nuns who had renounced their vows. About Jampal Dradhul See Jackson 1984: 131: "The ruler 'Jam-dpal-dgra-'dul is also mentioned in Monthang M[olla] as the successor to Bkra-shis-snying-po." See Jackson 1984: 131: "We have already met with the name 'jam-dpal-dgra-'dul above as that of the sender of a letter to a nobleman in the Muktinath area. Its recipient was one Kun-dga'-rab-brtan of the Chongkhor (chos 'khor) lineage, and the letter was dated the water-horse year (probably 1822). Many other documents mentioning him and both the prior and succeeding kings no doubt survive in Lo; such documents probably can also be found in the archives of the Nepalese government." Gyalshab Rinpoche also issued another decree to Samling monastery on the matter of hunting and nun's issue. It was issued on the request of Lama Samdrup Namgyal in female Earth-Sheep that is probably in 1859. See Gyalshab's Decree 1859?.

<sup>21</sup> See Gyalrong Decree 1757: 1: "*bla ma yang ston 'di la/ dgon 'brog pyag rdzas dang bca' lag rgyud 'gro 'di'i/ mi gzhān gi mtsan bitsug ja (ha) thab yar thab/ gnod 'tshes mkhan dang 'phrog bcom byed sa med pa'i bka' rtag yin cing/ zhug ma'i mtho' dman drag gzhān gi gnod tshes byed mkhan su yod kyang/ rgyal rong rgyal khab so sor gis rtsa chod rgyab rten rgyab shug rgya nag gi bka' khrem gang dgos mdzad lug yod pa'i/ mi gzhān kun gyi go bar bgyis/ mi dbang chen po sa skyong kun dga' ra dzi zhes/ bsam gling dgon du phul/ me glang zla 8 tshes 13/ khyin lung kri bzhug/'*"

<sup>22</sup> See Jackson 1984: 130: "The sole son of Bsod-nams-bstan-'dzin-dbang-rgyal was, according to the *gdung rabs*, the ruler Dbang-rgyal-rdo-rje, one of the better known kings of Lo. He is mentioned in both *Namgyal M[olla]* and *Monthang M[olla]*. His name would also be mentioned in *Tsarang M[olla]* except for the lacuna that continues through the beginning of the passage about him. Nepalese sources speak of Dbang-rgyal-rdo-rje as being the ruler of Lo immediately after the conquest of Jumla by Gurkha. Thus he can be identified with the ruler mentioned in *Tsarang M[olla]* who received high recognition from the Chinese emperor on account of his skillful (diplomatic?) actions during the Tibetan-Nepalese war of 1788-1792."

## Abbreviations

### Gyalrong Decree

*Rgyal rong rgyal po Kun dga' ra dzi'i bka' shog*, 1757, preserved in Samling monastery, Dolpo, Nepal.

### Gyalshab's Decree

*Rgyal zhabs rin po che'i bka' shog*, 1859? preserved in Samling, Dolpo Nepal.

### Mustang Decree-I

*Rgyal po bkra shis snying po dang 'chi med phan bde'i snying po mched kyi bka' shog*, 1802, preserved in Samling, Dolpo Nepal.

### Mustang Decree-II

*Glo bo chos rgyal a haM 'jam dpal dgra 'dul lhan rgyas bka'*, 1836, preserved in Samling, Dolpo Nepal.

### Chen Qingying and Zhang Ziling

2008 Dui Songba Kanbu ji qi 'Ruyi Baoshushi'de yanjiu. In Chi Shiyuan ed., *Jinian Liu Shengqi xiansheng bainian danchen ji zangzu lishi wenhua lunji*, Beijing: Zhongguo zangxue chubanshe: 248-258.

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Yang sgom mi 'gyur mtshan

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Plate 1: Decree issued by Vice-brigade of Tsang garrison (Samling monastery, photo by Geshe Dge legs sbyin pa, 2010)