

**Title:** Recounting the Past? The contest between British historical and new Chinese interpretations of the Younghusband Mission to Tibet of 1904.

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**Abstract:**

The work of the orientalist historian has been hampered by the laudatory glare that has developed around the figure of Sir Francis Younghusband and the 1904 British 'Mission' to Tibet. In western writing, a revisionist approach to studying the Mission has only recently started to gather pace. Capturing a Chinese and Tibetan perspective of events is vital for a better understanding of its causes and consequences. Greater use of non-European sources is acknowledged as being one route to this goal.

In this article we focus on the ways in which contemporary British accounts bolstered notions of cultural imperialism and how later Chinese sources, in the Tibetan language, set about critiquing these ideas. This analysis utilises primary sources which have received little attention from western scholars: a translation and commentary in a cartoon book, *The War of the Wood Dragon Year* (1995); translations of the pillar inscriptions found on the Heroes' Memorial Pillar in Gyantse; and a description of representations in the *Memorial Hall of the Anti-British* in Gyantse Dzong.

**Keywords:** History, Britain, Tibet, China, Perspectives, Imperialism, Translation.

## I

History has been kind to those westerners who took part in the British 'Mission' to Tibet in 1904. Not only did many of the young officers and men who took part in the campaign go on to notable achievements and remain beyond reproach, but also its leader, Sir Francis Younghusband (1863-1942), became a national hero.

Long before Younghusband was dispatched to Tibet he was already a household name in Britain. In 1887, aged only twenty-four, he had discovered a new land route across the Gobi desert and descended into India through the purportedly impassable Mustagh Pass. He was a celebrated 'Great Game thruster',<sup>1</sup> a hawk in today's parlance; politically conscious of the Russian threat to India, the jewel in the British imperial crown, and a firm believer in the maxim that the best form of defence is offence.

In 1904, when Younghusband returned after his Mission in Tibet, he was lauded by the press, granted a private audience with Edward VII and feted with honorary doctorates by leading universities. These laudations were fuelled by self-satisfied narratives - both he and his fellow officers trumpeted their achievements and sought to justify their actions in a collection of books that can be described as celebratory accounts.<sup>2</sup> More immediate accounts were provided by the 'following correspondents', as this was one of the first major overseas campaigns that British journalists were permitted to accompany. The installation of a telegraph line as far as the Tibetan town of Gyantse allowed the accounts of Edmund Candler, Perceval Landon and others to be wired to London daily and achieve front-page status in *The Times* and *The Daily Mail*. These correspondents were already placing the finishing touches to books on the long sea journey home and were published

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<sup>1</sup> P. Fleming, *Bayonets to Lhasa* (1962, London: Rupert Hart-Davis), 67.

<sup>2</sup> F. Younghusband, *India and Tibet. A history of the relations which have subsisted between the two countries from the time of Warren Hastings to 1910; with a particular account of the Mission to Lhasa of 1904* (1910, London: John Murray). L.A. Waddell, *Lhasa and its Mysteries* (1905, New York: Hutton). W. J. Ottley, *With Mounted Infantry in Tibet* (1905, London: John Murray).

to much acclaim on their arrival.<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly all this influenced the ability of western historiography to provide a rounded critical appraisal of the Mission. Later British historians followed suit and were subsequently kind to Younghusband, with authors such as Seaver (1952), Fleming (1962) and French (1994) maintaining a tradition of hero worship.<sup>4</sup>

Younghusband's detailed account of the Mission, published in 1910<sup>5</sup>, was immensely popular with his contemporary audience and justified the actions of his superiors, himself and his men. It contained passages resonating with cultural imperialism and Missionary zeal typical of the day. For example, of the Tibetans, he wrote: 'there are in them latent potentialities for good, which only await the right touch to bring them into being'; and similar passages and sentiments were also littered about his officers' accounts. Indeed, Younghusband's account, published six years after his return, had already been preceded by numerous tomes of congratulatory, celebratory accounts by his fellow officers, written to fulfil Edwardian society's yearning for the adventure and fascination with the oriental and occult.<sup>6</sup>

Later biographies and general histories found it difficult to question the bold statements made in these early accounts and failed to provide any critical appraisal of Younghusband or his Mission.<sup>7</sup> In western historiography, revision only started to gather pace with Charles Allen's analysis, published to mark the centenary of events, which acknowledged that greater use of non-European sources in the future would be one route to capturing Tibetan perspectives.<sup>8</sup> In this article we respond to that call by presenting three newly translated Tibetan sources to compare with the contemporaneous British accounts of the Mission; and the contexts and ways in which they have attempted to reinterpret the Mission and its consequences.

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<sup>3</sup> E. Candler, *The Unveiling of Lhasa* (1905, London: Thomas Nelson). P. Landon, *Lhasa* (1905, London: Hurst and Blackett).

<sup>4</sup> G. Seaver, *Francis Younghusband, Explorer and Mystic* (1952, London: John Murray). Fleming, *op. cit.* P. French, *Younghusband: The Last Great Imperial Adventurer* (1994, London: Flamingo).

<sup>5</sup> Younghusband, *op. cit.* Francis Younghusband had been the British Resident in Kashmir prior to his return to London.

<sup>6</sup> See for example, William Ottley, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, George Seaver, *op. cit.*; Peter Fleming, *op. cit.*; and Patrick French, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> Charles Allen, *Duel in the Snows* (2004, London: John Murray).

The three sources presented here have a shared approach: they emphasise the patriotism and heroics of the Tibetan troops, expose the brutality and greed of the British troops and show how any British gains were achieved through trickery and deception. Each source has been designed to have a broad appeal to both Han Chinese and Tibetans of all ages and levels of education, using text, image and forms of material culture such as public monuments to inform. This new Chinese narrative, showing patriotic Tibetans fighting on behalf of the motherland, could simply be seen as another addition to a communist propaganda archive that is bulging at the seams. However, one of its historians, John Powers has suggested a more complex, interesting perspective - that this archive curiously carries the weight of both orthodoxy and authenticity. 'It is important to recognize', he reminds us 'that these writers apparently believe it (their new account) to be true, despite the fact that it differs substantially from eyewitness accounts' and that each of their sources must be taken as part of a 'wider narrative of imperialism and the victimization of China by western powers'.<sup>9</sup>

## II

Tsering Dhondup's cartoon book, *The War of the Wood Dragon Year*, published in Lhasa in 1995, has been available in most bookshops in Tibet for well over a decade. The book presents a Chinese account of the Mission combining pictures with text in contrasting portrayals of British deceit and Tibetan daring and patriotism. British agency is downplayed, her successes due more to the inefficiency of the Tibetan central government and the disorganisation of its military than her own creditable efforts. This type of explanation has formed the backbone of anti-British, Chinese propaganda about Tibet's position and predicament for decades.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> John Powers, *History as Propaganda. Tibetan Exiles versus the People's Republic of China* (2004, Oxford: Oxford University Press), 90 and 94. This notion of a constant unfolding and interpretation of events against an ever-changing present is appealing and provides a natural invitation to scholars to take work on this subject to its next level, that is if sources written by Tibetans themselves can be found.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-72.

*The War of the Wood Dragon Year*'s cartoons present a patriotic Chinese version of the events leading up to the fall of the fortress at Gyantse in July 1904. Its three main themes are clearly discernible: the cruel cunning of the British officers; the disgraceful actions of their men, including looting; and the noble defence by the heroic Tibetans. The preamble is clear about the book's purpose and the Chinese authors explain that 'everyone, from children to old people, should know the true history of 1904'.<sup>11</sup> The cartoons and their accompanying text challenge traditional British perspectives on many counts. For instance, Dhondup's account begins with a romantic description of Tibet as, 'a unique place, so clean and special, surrounded by the white snow mountains, where the food is nutritious, and there is an abundance of water and crops, there is no illness nor famine'.<sup>12</sup> Youngusband and his officers had painted a very different picture: food supplies were always low, with drinking water in high demand.<sup>13</sup> Austine Waddell, the Principal Medical Officer of the Mission, was far from impressed with conditions in Tibetan settlements, describing Tuna as, 'appallingly foul and dirty, possibly the dirtiest and foulest town on earth ... (while) the people of Phari-the-Foul are in thorough keeping with the squalor and filth amidst which they live'.<sup>14</sup> Even in the capital, Lhasa, conditions were said to be poor. Holdich's description of 1904 is graphic. Lhasa, he wrote, 'is in truth a scattered, unkempt, and ill-regulated town, full of impurities, infested with savage dogs, obscene pigs, and night prowlers'.<sup>15</sup>

Youngusband's motives are quickly questioned by Dhondup. One cartoon describes how, in 1903, 'Englishmen were sent to Lhasa to make an agreement with the Tibetan

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<sup>11</sup> Tsering Dhondup, *The War of the Wood Dragon Year* (1995, Lhasa: The Tibetan People's Publishing House), face: 'de nang 'khod pa'i bod rigs dpon dmag rnams dang snga phyi'i gyul ' khrug khag lo rgyus thog dngos su byung ba'i gnas tshul ngo ma rang la gshi btsol te bris pa shig yin pas lo chung byis pa rnams kyis mtshon pa'i rgya che'i klog pa po chos skabs de'i lo rgyus dngos la mkhyen rtogs dang 'brel rang rigs mes po rnams kyi bla na med pa'i snying stobs la slob sbyong gnang rgyur phan 'gyur che snyam mol'

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 1. *sa gtsang ba zas bcud che la lo chu 'dzoms shing nad mug med pa sogs deg mtshan du mas phyug pa'i yul khyad par can shig yud pa 'di ni rang rnams kyi pha yul bod ljongs shes pa de yin/*

<sup>13</sup> Moreover, crops appeared so thin on the ground that one British officer noted the expression the Tibetan equivalent of 'when pigs fly' was the literal translation of 'when rice grows on Phari Dzong' (see Allen, *op. cit.*, 79). Dzong is Tibetan for a fortress or fortified place.

<sup>14</sup> Waddell, *op. cit.*, 100. Waddell was also a Lieutenant Colonel in the Indian Medical Service. He was in the pay of the British Museum as a collector. He was the closest the British had to an expert on Buddhism, its philosophy and art, having published on the issue.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Holdich, *Tibet the Mysterious* (1906, London: A. Rivers), 256.

government'.<sup>16</sup> Since the last Englishman to have visited Lhasa was Thomas Manning in December 1811, this must refer to the months that Younghusband waited just inside Tibet at Khamba Dzong for the Amban and Tibetan delegations to arrive for talks. From the outset, the true intention of the British is described in the cartoon's commentary as 'using every opportunity to invade further into Tibet, in order kill and rob ... thinking only about occupying Tibet'.<sup>17</sup> The British foreign policy line, as expressed by Lord Curzon, preferred to emphasise an interest in maintaining Tibet only as a buffer zone between British India and the Russians to the north.<sup>18</sup> One modern Chinese historian, Ya Hanzhang, supports Dhondup's view, concluding that '... with a pack of lies the British were (now) trying in an underhand way to annex Tibet's Mount Lengtu. It is the land and the people that they are out to grab'.<sup>19</sup>

*The War of the Wood Dragon Year* goes on to brand Younghusband as a coward, heavily reliant on deceit and cunning. Long before his entry to Lhasa, he is depicted plotting how best to disarm the Tibetan forces at Chumi Shengo, though according to traditional British accounts their Indian troops were ordered to disarm the Tibetans only after a protracted stalemate. Subsequent cartoons describe how Younghusband was always plotting a massacre by commanding the British troops to pretend to disarm themselves by removing one bullet from the barrel of their rifles, but leaving the full magazine attached.<sup>20</sup> In plate (cartoon) 24, the British are clearly depicted unloading bullets from their rifles, ordering the Tibetans to extinguish the fuses of their weapons in return.

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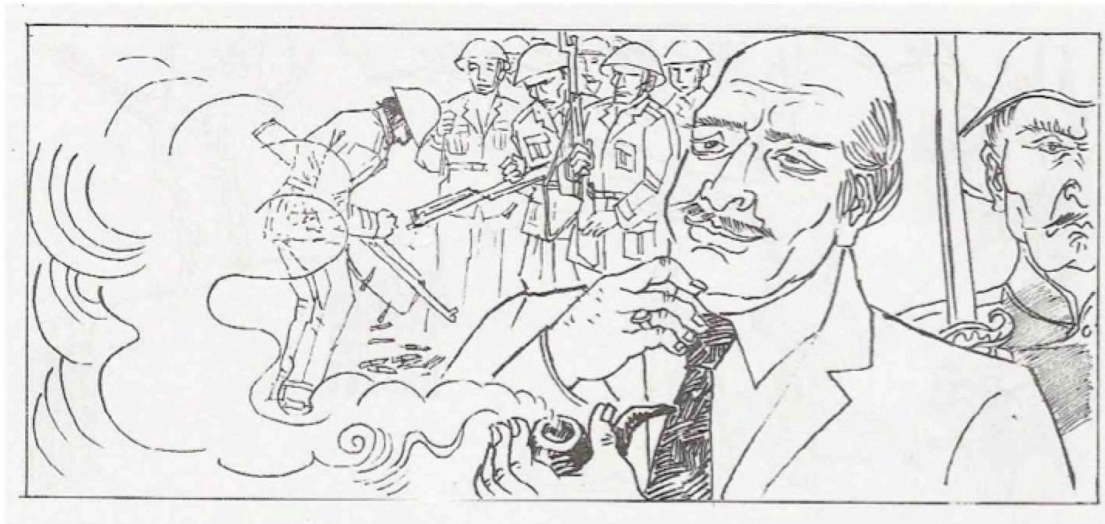
<sup>16</sup> Dhondup, *op. cit.*, 6. *1903 lo'i zla bshi pa'i nang lha sar bod dbyin chings moll*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. *don du kho pa tshos go skabs yod tshad spyad de bon du nas 'dzul gyis mi gsod 'phrog bcom gyi byi nang spel mus su gnas/*. The Amban was the Chinese Imperial Resident – the representative at Lhasa.

<sup>18</sup> One biographer of Curzon noted that 'no one who has gazed upon the mighty peaks of the Himalayas beyond Darjeeling has not felt instinctively that they are the natural northern boundary of India'. Lovat Fraser, *India under Curzon and after* (1911, London: Heinemann), 135.

<sup>19</sup> Ya Hanzhang, *The Biographies of the Dalai Lamas* (1991, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press), 183.

<sup>20</sup> Dhondup, *op. cit.* 24. *shi gros byed 'go 'dzugs khar dbyin dmag gi 'go gtso had se phing gis chings gros legs grub yong phyir bsnyad btags nas phyogs gnyis ka'i mtshon cha phab dgos lugs brjod pa dang 'brel dbyin dmag gi me mda'i nang gi mde'i 'don du bcug khul gyis bod dmag gi me mda'i sbud ti yam gsod dgos lugs brjod/* 'When they were about to start peaceful negotiations, General Younghusband suggested that both sides should disarm. He pretended to order the British troops to empty the bullets from their rifles, and told the Tibetans to put out the fuses on their guns'.



**Figure 1:** Younghusband shown plotting with General Macdonald on how to disarm the Tibetans. British troops can be seen in the background removing bullets from their rifles. Source: *The War of the Wood Dragon Year*, plate 24.

The text to plate 26 goes on to place an emphasis on how British deceit soon turned to brutality: ‘when the invader’s deception had succeeded, they flung aside their verbal promise. Suddenly one of the British officers took his gun and started shooting at the Tibetans. He killed two Tibetan generals on the spot’.<sup>21</sup> In the scuffles that broke out during this episode, a Tibetan general fired his pistol, the signal for both sides to engage the enemy. In the battle that followed, as many as seven-hundred Tibetans died. In Chumi Shengo the Mission had turned to massacre.

British accounts are unanimous in their repetition that the Commanding Officer, General Macdonald’s, orders were not to fire unless fired upon, recognition that demonstrating adherence to the rules of fair military engagement supported British actions. Younghusband’s account emphasised his fears for the safety of the soldiers under such orders and echoed scenarios of heroic sacrifice familiar in recent British imperial situations. He wrote: ‘I asked General Macdonald to order his men not to fire upon the

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 26. *btsan 'dzum pas rang gi gyo jus lam lhongs bying mtshams kha dan rgyab bskyur gyis glo bur du dbyin ji'i dmag dpon shig gis bod dmag dpon rigs tsho'i thog tu me mda' 'phangs te mda' dpon lha sdings pa dang rnam sra gling pa sogs de gar bkrongs/*

Tibetans until the Tibetans first fired on them. In making such a request I knew the responsibilities I was incurring. We were but a handful of men – about 100 Englishmen and 1,200 Indians – in the face of a superior number of Tibetans, in the heart of their country, 15,000 feet above the sea, and separated from India by two high passes'.<sup>22</sup> The journalist, Candler concurred, clearly pointing the finger of blame for any massacre on the Depon Landang, the Tibetan general, describing his opening shot as the 'last act of a desperate man, ignorant and regardless of what might ensue'. Candler argued that for Landang to return to Lhasa having failed to halt the British advance, not having fired a shot, would have spelt his end, so either way, 'his shot was suicidal'.<sup>23</sup>

The atrocities of the British soldiers and especially the pillage is given prominence in the cartoon book, though Allen's account notes that orders had been given for no looting to take place, a belief endorsed at the time by the curator, David Macdonald. Recent Chinese historiography contests this vehemently, indeed, Wang Furen and Suo Wenqing's popular work, *Highlights of Tibetan History* has a chapter entitled 'British capitalists grow more covetous!'<sup>24</sup> The cartoons' graphic representations of British looting are accompanied by highly evocative text.

'Then the British army entered like a hungry wolf into the valley, they killed the men and raped the women. They then robbed and pillaged, and on the way they set fire to monasteries such as Changling monastery and Kumbum monastery.'<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, Dhondup suggests this rape and pillage was no isolated incident, as following the fall of Nyaning Monastery, the British troops 'went inside and looted things (and)

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<sup>22</sup> Younghusband, *op. cit.*, 175. His readers would have recognised the similarities with General Gordon's position in Khartoum (1884-5) and with events at Rorke's Drift in the Zulu War (1879). Waddell remarks in his account on the 'self-restraint of our men [the British] in advancing up to the armed Tibetans'- it was the case of 'Gentlemen of the Enemy! Fire First!' (Waddell, *op. cit.*, 157).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>24</sup> Allen, *op. cit.*, 224. David MacDonald, who later became a Political Officer in Sikkim, was in 1905 a curator commissioned to assemble the Tibetan artefacts taken to the Calcutta Museum. In his account, he claimed that 'so far as I was personally able to observe, there was very little in the way of looting'. David Macdonald, *Twenty Years in Tibet* (1932, London: Seeley, Service & Co), 26. Wang Furen and Suo Wenqing, *Highlights of Tibetan History* (1984, Beijing: New World Press), 121.

<sup>25</sup> Dhondup, *op. cit.*, 32. *dbyin dmag 'di bshin g can gzan ltogs pa klung du chas pa ltar gar slebs sar pho gsod mo spyod dang jag bcom rku ;phrog gi bya ngan brtsams te lam shor du byang gling dang sku 'bum sogs dgon khag mang po mer bsreg btang nas sku gsung thugs rten rnams su tab su thob kyis khyer/*



engaged in limitless barbaric acts beyond humanity. They set fire to the monastery and destroyed it'.<sup>26</sup> Carrington's recent analysis of the looting has preferred to note the actions as conforming to a historical norm, as part of the enduring British desire to build an 'imperial archive'. Official reporting, he suggests, always 'denied improper behaviour and the books, which were subsequently published by members of the Mission all reproduced a sanitised version of events ... and there was little or no mention of looting'.<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 2:** British troops looting the monastery at Tsechen, July 1904. Source: *The War of the Wood Dragon Year*, plate 72.

Also intriguing are episodes which are, when compared with traditional British accounts, completely rewritten. For example, there is praise for the cunning and stealth of the Tibetans in their raid on the British camp at Kangma. In a night attack over one hundred British troops were killed; and at Nanying Monastery, previously understood to be a

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 72. *gnas rnying dgon pa'i bod dmag rnams rgyer phyir 'then byas rjes dgra bas dgon nang du 'dzul nas gtsug lag khang de'i nang dngos rdzas rnams rku khyer sreg gcog sogs kla klo'i spyod ngan ci rigs spel nas dgon par gtor skyon tsad med btang!*

<sup>27</sup> M. Carrington, 'Officers Gentlemen and Thieves: The looting of monasteries during the 1903/4 Younghusband Mission to Tibet', *Modern Asian Studies* 37 (2003), 86. For further discussion of looting during the Mission see, T. Myatt, 'Last Great Imperial Adventurer or Imperialist Lackey Running Dog? Contemporary and Centenary Perspectives on the Younghusband Mission to Tibet of 1903-4' (M.Phil. Thesis: University of Oxford, 2004). Museums in London, Leeds, Liverpool, Aberdeen and elsewhere still have many artefacts from this campaign.

small-scale victory over a British encampment they ‘rendered the British camp into dust’.<sup>28</sup> The description that follows describes the Tibetans ‘fighting behind enemy lines, beheading the enemy like you remove the heads from a sheaf of barley, and they (the British) were falling down like timber’.<sup>29</sup>

The dramatic contest between traditional British and new Chinese interpretations is well illustrated in the disagreement over the number of British casualties. For instance, though the fighting had been hand-to-hand at Nanying, British accounts recorded no more than five British and Indian casualties. A lurid Chinese narrative disagrees: ‘the Tibetans killed or wounded about two hundred British soldiers, achieving a great victory ... The Ata (Kongpo) warriors have come, the British have been knocked down on the ground, and the stone steps of Nanying monastery, are running red with blood’.<sup>30</sup>

Dhondup’s text claims that the siege of Gyantse Dzong lasted another month and the ‘Tibetan soldiers repulsed the enemy without losing even a fistful of ground’<sup>31</sup> before the powder room was destroyed by a chance shell. In their analysis of subsequent events, Chinese interpretations addressed the British accounts which had done so much to deny agency to the Tibetan soldiery. *The War of the Wood Dragon Year’s* text sets great store to Tibetan sacrifice - with the realisation that resistance was now futile, the Tibetans opted for heroic suicide. The narrative has the General explaining to his troops that it ‘is better to take our own lives rather than be alive under the enemies!’ and concludes on how ‘they gave their lives in the defence of the motherland’.<sup>32</sup> The next cartoon shows the heroic suicide of soldiers jumping from the cliff, rather than become subject to a

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 51. *kong dmag ya dar nyi ma grags pa gcen gung gnyis pus gri kha bsgrigs nas dgra dmag nyi shu tsham mtshon lam du drangs te dpa' dar blangs/*

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 70. *bod dmag tshos dgra bo'i dpung sgar gshags te dgra mgo snye rdog breg breg dang phung po thang sing 'gyel 'gyel du btang/*

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 71. *gnas rnying gyul 'gyed nang bod dmag tshos dbyin dmag nyis brgya lhad tsam bsad rmas btang nas rgyal kha chen po blangs pas yul mi tshos ya dar kong dmag slebs byung dbyin ji sa la brdabs song gnas rnying dgon pa'i rdo gcal dmar po'i khrag gis 'tshos song shes bod dmag dpa' rgod tshor bsangs brjod byed kyi yod/*

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 103. *de ltar zla ngo gcig lhad tsam ring bod dmag tshos dkra bo'i tshur rgol lan tshar mar po bzlog nas rang sa sbar mthil tsham yam dgra lag tu ma shor bar brdan por bsrungs/*

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 116. *ru dpon ya dar nyi grags kyis 'thab grogs lhad bsdad tshor lta bshin tshig thag chod pos da ni mtha' ma'i dus la gtugs pas dgra 'og tu gsog pa las rang srog rang gis lcebs na dga' shes brjod mtshoms tshang mas lag gdang sbrel de mnyam du lce'i blo thag bcad/ ; 119. mchongs te rang gi shi khrag phung po'i grib ma tsham yang dgra lag tu ma sprad par pha yul srung skyob byed ched gces pa'i tshes srog legs skyes su phul /*

British occupation. This is a style of martyrdom that has cross-cultural currency and potency.

### III

Memorials constructed in the past thirty years make a visible and prominent contribution to new narratives of events of 1904. Pillars in Gyantse, constructed by local authorities, display the Chinese account, glorifying and conflating the heroic Tibetan's defence of the motherland with the beneficence of the Chinese State. The tradition of building such monumental pillars, which celebrate and record historical events, date back to before the ninth century in Tibet and work to confirm the region's place and status in the national story.<sup>33</sup> Naturally enough the funders of such monuments have a hand in which version of history it depicts and, coincidentally, the 'Heroes' Memorial Pillar', as it is popularly known, was erected by the Gyantse Municipal Council at the time of Hong Kong's return to China in July 1997. The Gyantse pillar, with inscriptions in both Chinese and Tibetan, explains the siege's place in 'a history of both sorrow and joy in the patriotic defence of the country'; and it lauds the town's defence of the Dzong against the British in 1904.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> H. Richardson, 'Three ancient inscriptions from Tibet,' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1949), 45-65.

<sup>34</sup> Examples of early ninth and tenth century pillars and monuments can be seen in the main square before the Potala in Lhasa and outside the temple complex in Shigatse.



**Figure 3.** Gyantse Dzong and the Heroes' Memorial Pillar. Photograph: T. Myatt.

The pillar consists of a concrete circular base with text panels below a relief mural painted bright gold. On top of this sits a high stone pinnacle with a Maoist quotation in red on each of its three sides.<sup>35</sup> The pillar echoes the cartoon book, praising the bravery of the Tibetan soldiers and recording high numbers of British casualties. The account begins with a description of the first stage of the Mission and its arrival in Khamba

<sup>35</sup> Heroes' Memorial Pillar (translation): *rgyal rtse'i mi dmangs kyi dbyin 'gog gnas tshul ngo sprod mdor bsdus spyi lo 1903 lo'i zla ba 12 par dbyin jis mtha' mtshams kyi gnad don khar g.yar te pho nya hpha lang se rung ha'o hphang dang mad kha thang na'e yis bkod 'doms 'og dbyin dmag chig stong tsam sne khrid de gro mo nas 'dzul te bod la btsan 'dzul byas pa red 1904 lo'i zla ba 4 pa'i tshes 13 nyin rgyal rtse dgra dmag gi lag tu shor ba'i rjes dpa' bo'i rgyal rtse'I mi dmangs tshos bod sa khul khag gi dmag dmangs tsho'i rgyab skyor 'og dpa' ngar zhum med kyis btsan 'dzul par 'gog rgol byas pa red zla ba drug pa'i zla stod la rgyal rtse'i dmag dmangs chig stong tsam gyis mtshan mo dbyin ji'i dmag sgar la 'jab rgol byas nas lcang lho gling kha blangs pa dang dbyin ji'i dmag mi ha lam tshang ma rtsa med bzos pa red zla smad la hpha lang se rung ha'o hphang gi dpung rog khrid de tshur rgol byas nas slar yang rgyal rtse grong brdal btsan bzung byas pa ma zad zla ba 7 pa'i tshe 5 nyin rdzong ri'i mkhar rdzong gi mtha' skor nas tshur rgol byas par dbyin 'gog dpa' bo [IS] bod mda' dang me sgyogs mdung dpa' dam 'or rdo sogs spyad de dbyin dmag dang shi gson gyi 'thab rtsod byas nas nyin mtshan gsum 'thab sa brtan srung byas rung mthar mdel zad rgyags rdzogs dang nying bas mang ba mi do bas rkyen dpa' bo lhas 'phro rnam kyi shi yang mgo mi sgur bar g.yang gzar nas mehongs te rgyal khab kyi ched du rang srog blos btang ba red dus yun zla ba gsum tsam ring gi rgyal rtse'i rdzong ri srung skyob byed pa'i dmag 'khrug des btsan 'dzul par rdung rdeg tsha nan btang ba dang dga' skyo gnyis ldan gyi rgyal srung dang rgyal gces kyi lo rgyus bkod yod/ rgyal rtse rdzong mi dmangs srid gzhung nas 1997,7. (Note: there are no full translations of the inscriptions published elsewhere, nor are there any translations offered in the vicinity of the monument).*

Dzong in December 1903 for negotiations. Then, however, the commentary moves straight to the early part of June 1904 when the People's Militia 'made a night surprise attack on the British camp, taking back Changlo Linka, and wiping out almost all of the British soldiers'. This six-month gap creates a record without reference to the failed negotiations at Khamba Dzong and, more notably and unlike Dhondup's account, the bloody battle at Chumi Shengo.

The pillar's inscriptions take the opportunity to use Macdonald's storming of Gyantse Dzong to praise Tibetan resistance. The Tibetan 'heroes', short of ammunition and luck, used 'arrows, guns, cannons, spears, slings and long swords engaged in a life and death battle' lasting three days and nights - not the single afternoon described by British accounts. Indeed, the monument's text further claims that the Tibetans held out at the top of the Dzong for about three months, ultimately ending in a British defeat through withdrawal. Crucially, the pillar consolidates the stories of sacrifice in preference to occupation, with its potent text claiming that 'not surrendering in the face of death, they sacrificed their lives for the sake of the country by jumping from the steep cliffs of the Dzong'.<sup>36</sup> British accounts made no mention of mass suicides of this kind; Younghusband merely noted that 'the Tibetans ... fled precipitately'.<sup>37</sup>

This story of martyrdom is still being contested. The Tibetan government in exile has condemned Chinese interpretations of the siege at Gyantse as yet another xenophobic attack on Britain. In an interview in 2004, Tseten Samdup of the Dalai Lama's London based Office, issued a strong reminder that while 'the British invasion of 1904 resulted in the death of hundreds of Tibetans, almost a thousand, in and around Gyantse Castle ... there wasn't any mass suicide such as jumping from the cliff.' 'Unfortunately', he concluded, 'the Chinese are always drumming up anti-Western feeling amongst the Tibetans and their own Chinese people'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> This claim is supported atop the Dzong where there now stands a black memorial stone recalling the episode in Chinese, Tibetan and basic English. The text on the pillar reads, 'Eternal glory to the hero martyrs of jump in cliff. The place of jump in cliff that against British hero Martyrs [sic]'.

<sup>37</sup> Younghusband, *op. cit.*, 220. Younghusband's recent biographer, Patrick French, also found no evidence to suggest that there was any mass suicide when Gyantse Dzong was stormed.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Tseten Samdup (Dalai Lama's London based Office, 2004). Available at: <http://www.geocities.com/glossograph/tibet99castlegyantsect.html>. Accessed July 2007.

New Chinese interpretations of the British Mission are given an unashamedly propagandist turn in the *Memorial Hall of the Anti British*, a small museum at the peak of the Dzong at Gyantse. With a view to promoting a unity of purpose between Tibetans and Chinese, information panels in Chinese and English show Tibet (as) an unalienable part of the motherland. The account of the siege inflates British troop numbers to over ten thousand, immediately creating a subtext of courage in the three thousand Tibetans who opposed them. The theme of British deceit runs throughout, with panels following Dhundop's account, clearly accusing Younghusband of trickery in his disarming of the Tibetans at Chumi Shengo. However, the narrative brings new, unsubstantiated detail to the story. For instance, in response to the initial British gunshots, a Tibetan bodyguard is said to have axed more than ten British soldiers to death, including the following reporter 'Edwandchadler' [sic]. Traditional British accounts reported no fatalities at Chumi Shengo - General Macdonald's 'After Action Report' telegraphed to London on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 1904 describes only Candler's injuries as 'dangerous' rather than fatal and those of four others as 'severe' and eight with 'slight' injuries. Candler, survived and returned to Britain soon after and published his best seller, *The Unveiling of Lhasa*, in 1905.<sup>39</sup>

The subject of the final panel is particularly noteworthy, as it repeats the claim that some Tibetans defending the fortress sacrificed their lives rather than live to face British occupation. Murals which show them jumping from the steep cliffs of the fortress are brought to a conclusion with statements that 'the invaders were severely beaten!' The event's status as an iconic episode in Tibet's resistance against the British has attracted other memorable narratives. Furen and Wenqing, for instance have also claimed that the Tibetans, 'donned sheepskins and hid themselves among their sheep,' rather than be taken prisoner by the British.<sup>40</sup>

Gyantse's status as the 'City of Heroes' is commemorated by notices at the museum's exit; and in 1961, the castle (Dzong) was given the Council's highest award as a 'cultural

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<sup>39</sup> 'After Action Report No. 1060-A', in Major-General (Retired) Shubhi Sood, *Younghusband: A Troubled Campaign* (2005, New Delhi: India Research Press), 63-7.

<sup>40</sup> Wang Furen and Suo Wenqing, *op. cit.*, 124. This might be an interesting appropriation of Younghusband's description of Tibetan cowardice in battle, when he claimed they had 'huddled together like a flock of sheep behind a wall'. See Younghusband, *op. cit.*, 177.

unit'. Paradoxically, only five years later, the Cultural Revolution destroyed much of the Dzong and the monastery it overlooks. Repairs are still underway.

#### IV

In late Victorian England, Francis Younghusband had seemed to epitomise many of the most valued virtues of masculinity. He was a world record holder of the 100 yard dash, an explorer who found new passes into China and President and gold medallist of the Royal Geographic Society. Later in life he even supported Everest expeditions and was a founder of the World Congress of Faiths. He was, to some later writers, 'the last great imperial adventurer'.<sup>41</sup>

However, the 'contest' between traditional British and more recent Chinese interpretations has left Younghusband's reputation in tatters: he is called to account for leading a massacre rather than a Mission. Indeed, Powers notes how, in the long term the Mission caused China to 'realize the threat foreign imperialism posed for its claims to areas like Tibet, and prompted the government to take a more active and aggressive stance in asserting what it considered to be its rights'.<sup>42</sup> Clearly, one form of this aggression has been through recounting the events of 1904 in a way that would benefit its anti-British stance. We should not be too surprised. As early as the 1920s, Charles Bell, Resident Political Officer in Sikkim, warned that, 'by going in and then coming out again, we (the British) knocked the Tibetans down and left them for the first-comer to kick. We created a political vacuum, which is always a danger. China came in and filled it, destroying Tibetan freedom, for she feared that if we came again we should keep the country'.<sup>43</sup> The Chinese construction of the heroic narrative, of Tibetans standing resolutely against the British in 1904, is a very thinly veiled attempt to extend Tibet's distance from Britain and fill the vacuum by creating proximity and shared values with China.

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<sup>41</sup> French, *op.cit.*

<sup>42</sup> Powers, *op. cit.*, 83.

<sup>43</sup> Sir Charles Bell, *Tibet, Past and Present* (1927, Oxford: Oxford University Press), 165.

Historical enquiry still has some way to go before it edges nearer towards Tibetan perspectives, rather than Chinese ones expressed on their behalf; though without greater access to Tibetan records, including government papers, it will remain difficult to go far beyond the British and Chinese accounts of the Mission. Modern Tibetan scholarship has preferred to focus on the tensions of the Cultural Revolution and the problems presented by exile in the past fifty years or so. However, the centenary of the Mission and the more recent publication of a collection of letters written by the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama to leaders in Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim is prompting renewed growth in capturing a Tibetan perspective on these events. An analysis of these and other, related Tibetan sources will present a new slant on how the so-called Mission can be recounted, shifting agency and control in the contest over interpretation away from Tibet's historical masters.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> For insights into Tibetan perspectives, see Myatt's forthcoming D.Phil. Thesis, Oriental Institute, University of Oxford.



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