The purpose of this paper is to offer a socio-historical investigation into the administration of the Ganden phodrang (Tib. Dga’ ldan pho brang), the central government of Tibet, during the period from 1895, when the thirteenth Dalai Lama assumed power, to 1959, when the fourteenth Dalai Lama fled to India. In the first half of the 20th century, the Ganden phodrang had been functioning for almost three centuries, since 1642, when it was established by the Great Fifth. The organization of the administration evolved from the 17th century. It possessed from very early on precise written regulations, constitutions, administrative organizational rules (Tib. sgrig gzhi or sgrig srol) and codes or systems of laws (Tib. khrims yig or khrims srol) which remained in force until the end of its existence, organizing the government’s rules, the routines of administrative work, the administration of the territories and the exercise of justice.¹

It was reformed and improved several times over the centuries and, notably, during the period under scrutiny, through an unprecedented increase in the number of offices and their growing specialization. This process of rationalization has been described as common in the formation of a number of bureaucracies around the world. During this period of maximal extension, in the 1940s and 1950s, there were at least 422 positions held permanently by monk or lay officials in the different areas of administration (government, army, territorial administration, and House of the Dalai Lama). The officials (Tib. gzhung zhabs) of the Tibetan government were divided into a monastic branch, whose members were called rtse drung, and a lay branch, whose members were known as drung ’khor. The monastic branch was recruited from all levels of society, among monasteries, whereas the lay branch was recruited almost exclusively among the aristocracy. Moreover, a few aristocratic families had specialized in producing monk officials as well, and these aristocrat monk officials were called rje drung.

Thanks to oral and written sources, namely interviews with about seventy noble men and women, British archives and Tibetan autobiographies written by noble men and women, the data concerning the careers of 441 noble officials of the government have been collected and put into a database. The analysis here is restricted to these aristocratic officials, who were mostly lay officials. This latter fact is the reason why the officials included in the database, being aristocrats, divide into a massive majority of lay officials (90%) and a tiny minority of aristocratic monk officials.

The idea of this prosopographical database is to allow a different approach to the functioning of the political institutions and the administration, which would not be based on the norm or the way it is written or thought that they should function, but to view the whole question from the individual’s point of view, in practice, looking at the way the officials lived their careers and used the institutions, sometimes testing their flexibility and their limits. In that sense, this research is meant to supplement the

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2 Of the sixty-eight offices identified in the Ganden phodrang government in 1959, twenty-five had been created since 1895.
3 According to estimations based on our database and descriptions of the Ganden phodrang government (see the Bibliography). Theoretically, the number of lay and monk officials was 175 each, but in reality each group was larger. Indeed during the period under scrutiny the number of officials increased greatly. According to one of Melvyn Goldstein’s informants there were 200 lay officials and 230 monk officials, cf. M.C. Goldstein, *An Anthropological Study of the Tibetan Political System*, Ph.D. dissertation in Anthropology. Washington: University of Washington, 1968, p. 145.
4 The reason for this choice is that this study is part of broader research on the aristocracy of the Ganden phodrang for a Ph.D. in History completed in 2009 at the University of Paris Ouest-Nanterre La Défense and the Inalco, Paris.
5 Five men were originally monk officials and became lay officials. The status of ten officials remains unknown.
data available in Luciano Petech and Melvyn Goldstein’s pioneering works on the Ganden phodrang’s government.6

The sources mentioned above allow us to document a certain number of common practices in the professional sphere, and enable us to tackle two important aspects: on the one hand, the relationship between the officials and their office or job, which allows us to deal with a broader link—the one between the aristocrats, as a social group, and the government; on the other hand, the nature of the job or office in the Ganden phodrang administration. An interesting aspect, which concerns both the aristocracy in its role of servant of the State and the very organization of the Ganden phodrang, is the narrow intermingling of the family and professional worlds, and of the private and public spheres. The question that arises from these observations is whether one could speak of a partly patrimonial nature pertaining to the offices of the Ganden phodrang administration.7

First, a number of these practices will be set out, practices by which the position is treated as a private property. Then, a number of financial transactions which sometimes came with the exercise of public duties will be presented. Lastly, we will consider the financing of the State by officials.

1. Government Office: A Private Property?

1.1. Hereditary transmission of office

The first domain of interest for our analysis is the hereditary transmission of office. In his book Aristocracy and Government in Tibet, Luciano Petech describes the hereditary transmission of offices, in particular in the Council of Ministers, as having been abolished by the Chinese at the end of the 18th century.8

However, we know that the problem remained crucial at the end of the 19th century: according to rtsis dpon Shakabpa, in 1894, several reforms of the structure of the government were instituted, aimed at transforming government positions that had become almost hereditary in order to place more talented people in charge of these positions.9 A petition circulated, criticizing especially the fact that the ministers,

7 By “patrimonial nature of the office”, I do not refer to the traditional and personal political form of domination described as “patrimonialism” by Max Weber (M. Weber, Economy and Society, edited by Günther Roth and Claus Wittich and translated by Ephraim Fischof. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978 [first print 1922]), I refer only to a conception of the office or the job as a personal patrimony.
mainly lay officials, held their office in a hereditary way, a practice that aroused dissatisfaction among other officials. “From that point on, three lay cabinet ministers and one monk cabinet minister were appointed. Moreover, it was decided that except for awarding special commendations for past service to the government, appointments should be made on the basis of one’s learning, experience, effectiveness, good training, popularity, and honesty. Beyond that, people would not be promoted on the basis of possessing estates or on hereditary connections, as had previously been the case.”

Although the written rule was to appoint an official according to one’s ability and not according to one’s family connections, this practice continued to exist during the first half of the 20th century, although almost only for lesser offices. This phenomenon is not described in the literature. While working on the reconstruction of the careers of different members of one family who were officials, it appeared that it sometimes happened that they were appointed to the same positions. If we consider the number of lay officials available (more than two hundred), we could infer from this observation that the phenomenon was no coincidence and that aristocratic officials sometimes passed on their office to family members with the consent of the government, either from father to son, or between brothers. We can find several examples in the sources. As for the handing down of the office from father to son, we can give here three instances: first in the Zur Khang family, when Dbang chen nor bu retired in 1889, his post of general of the Dbus province (Tib. Dbus mda’ dpon) was handed down to his son Bsod nams dbang chen; second, when the aristocrat Sreg Shing Tshe ring margsal was promoted mayor of Lhasa (Tib. mi dpon) in 1936, he left his post of governor of the province of Lhe (Tib. Lhe rdzong dpon) in eastern Tibet and this post was directly given to his son Sreg Shing Blo bzang don grub; finally, at the end of the period, in May 1948, the son of Tsha Rong, rim bzhi Tsha Rong spas, took over the office of his father at ’Bri gung.

10 Ibid., p. 634.
11 L. Petech, op. cit., p. 150.
12 Who’s Who in Tibet, Corrected with a few subsequent additions up to 30th September 1948. Calcutta: Printed by the Government of India Press, 1949, p. 108 (IOR/L/P&S/20 D 220/2 or V/27/270/26). I have not been able to locate this “Lhe dzong in eastern Tibet” referred to in the British archives. It could be Lho rdzong, in Khams.
13 Lhasa Diary for the week ending 9th May 1948 from H.E. Richardson, The Indian Trade Agent, Gyantse and Officer in charge, Indian Mission, Lhasa, to the Political Officer in Sikkim, Gangtok (PRO/FO/371/70042 ex F8351/71/94).
14 In October 1910, the treasurer of the Panchen Lama, named “Badula Kusho” by the British, passed away during a very severe smallpox epidemic. The British trade agent notes in his diary, as if it was a current and normal practice, that this official’s son had applied for this office and was waiting for his appointment, cf. Gyantse diary for the month of November 1910, dated 3rd–6th December 1910 from Captain L. Weir, British Trade Agent at Gyantse (IOR/L/P&S/7/245/1945). In another report, a year later, we understand that the son had secured the position but had not long survived his father, cf. Gyantse and Yatung diary for the month of
The transmission could also happen between brothers. In the RAG KHA SHAG family, Tshe dbang rnam gryal was appointed finance minister (Tib. rtsis dpon) in place of his brother who was himself promoted general (Tib. mda’ dpon).\textsuperscript{15} It happened that this transmission was explicitly made by the government in recognition of services rendered by a brother. Similarly, after LHA SDINGS mda’ dpon was killed in March 1904 while fighting the British during the Younghusband expedition, his brother was appointed general of Dbus province.\textsuperscript{16}

We also observe that a number of rdzong dpon positions were frequently held by members of the same family, but not always in a consecutive way: thus, BON SHOD Tshe brtan rdo rje and his son Tshe brtan dbang rgyal were both governors of Nag tshang (Tib. Nag tshang ‘go pa, which is similar to a rdzong dpon-ship) though the latter did not directly succeed his father.\textsuperscript{17} The BON SHOD family probably had interests in this area, likely commercial interests, and sought the position.

Lastly, the importance of the family in the professional world is shown by the fact that several members of one family could work together: when GNANG BYUNG Spen pa don grub, who was minister (Tib. bka’ blon) from 1932, was sent as governor of Kham (Tib. mdo spyi),\textsuperscript{18} his son ’Gyur med dbang phyug was appointed to be his assistant (Tib. mdo spyi bka’ mgon) in 1939.\textsuperscript{19} Another example is that of two brothers, ’CHUM BKRAS GLING Mi ’gyur rdo rje and ZHE BO Blo bzang dar rgyas, who worked together at the gyod zhib las khungs (an office deciding legal disputes) from 1957 to 1959.\textsuperscript{20}

The study of the careers of the ZUR KHANG family over three generations provides a good example of the variety of these practices. Exactly as in the GNANG BYUNG family, when ZUR KHANG Dbang chen tshe brtan was appointed governor of Kham in 1936, his son Dbang chen dge legs followed him as his secretary.\textsuperscript{21} In the next generation, ZUR KHANG Dbang chen nor bu held simultaneously the functions of governor of Nyag rong (Tib. Nyag rong spyi khyab) and general of Dbus province (Tib. Dbus mda’ dpon). His son, Bsod nams dbang chen, not only started a military

\textsuperscript{15} Chiefs and Leading Families in Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet. Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1915, p. 16 (PRO/F0/371/2318 ex. 1933/10/141275/15), and Chiefs and leading families in Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet, 1920, p. 7 (PRO/FO/371/6652 ex. 1463/1463/10).

\textsuperscript{16} Chiefs and Leading Families in Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet, 1915, op. cit., p. 17.


\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 79.

\textsuperscript{19} Who’s Who 1942 (NAI), p. 21.

\textsuperscript{20} Anonymous interview. Blo bzang dar rgyas was born in 1933 into the ’CHUM BKRAS GLING family and came as a mag pa to the ZHE BO family.

\textsuperscript{21} There was an unspoken right for the Mdo spyi to choose who would accompany him to Chamdo and work in his office (Chab mdo bka’ shag).
career under the orders of his father as captain of Nyag rong (Tib. Nyag rong *brgya dpon*) and then as colonel of Dbus (Tib. Dbus *ru dpon*), he also took over the post of general from his father, when his father retired in 1889.²² Two generations later, in March 1950, Zur Khang Mkhyen rab dbang phyug succeeded his brother Lha dbang stobs rgyas as Tibetan trade agent in Gyantse (Tib. *tshong don spyi khyab*).²³

What can we deduce of this transmission of offices? It seemed logical that an individual would succeed his father or his brother in a position, inasmuch as the successor could benefit from the experience and expertise of the one he succeeded. Some aristocrat families thus developed a kind of professional specialization. We can also assume that this form of transmission only occurred when the office was considered a good professional choice.

It could be useful to link these situations with another practice that seemed to be quite widespread in the administration and which also involved a family relationship, the representation in the office.

### 1.2. Representation in the office by the family

In the Tibetan government, the office, more than an individual responsibility, seems to have been commonly considered as a family matter, or a family responsibility. It often occurred that an official would send as his representative in office a member of the family who was not necessarily a member of the government. This could be for a short while or for the whole length of the post.

In a 1935 British report, we read that one of the two governors of Gyantse was away from his post, and as it happened that the other governor was also absent from work, the father of the first governor replaced his son.²⁴ In another case, in 1946, the Tibetan trade agent of Gyantse (Tib. *tshong spyi khyab*) got himself represented by his brother.²⁵ As well, PPhreng Ring Raja, the elder brother of the Maharajah of Sikkim, and a fourth rank official in the Ganden phodrang, sent his son to replace him.²⁶ In January 1903, in the *Pha Lha* house, two of three brothers were officials of the Ganden phodrang and the third was a monk. This monk acted for his brother as ’Phyongs rgyas rdzong dpon, in Dbus province and as governor of Gyantse, although he was not a servant of the government, as the document highlights.²⁷

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²² L. Petech, *op. cit.*, p. 150.
²⁴ *Annual Report on the British Trade Agency, Gyantse, Tibet, for the year ending 31st March 1935* (IOR/L/P&S/12/4166/P3840).
²⁷ *Weekly Frontier Confidential Report for the Week ending the 24th January 1903, from E. H. B. Walsh, Esq., ICS, Deputy Commissioner, Darjeeling, to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal* (IOR/L/P&S/7/151/P347).
A particularly interesting example is that of the Gartok governor in western Tibet, Rin Sgang, who had himself represented from 1934 to 1936 by his wife, to the great amazement of the British who could not help express their admiration for the lady’s abilities. When the brother of this lady, a monk and brother-in-law of the official in charge came to replace her, the British were disappointed by his alleged incompetence.

The office could be not only a family matter, but, more broadly, a house matter, since it also happened that when no member of the family was available or willing to take the role, a trusted servant was sent as a representative (Tib. ngo tshab) instead. This practice of a noble official being represented by a servant has often been described in the literature. According to some officials, it was possible to ask and get permission from the government to do so, but in some cases the permission was not really necessary. One of the witnesses said that this practice increased greatly during the Reting regency.

We can also add that this phenomenon was parallel to the replacement of the gzhis bzhugs—the family estate steward, a position which was often held by a son of the house—by a servant of the house when a son could not hold this important position. We can thus observe that aristocrats acted in the same way whether the matter was connected to the interests of the house or the interests of the government.

As early as 1751 “The Thirteen-Article Ordinance for the More Efficient Governing of Tibet” (Tib. Bod kyi las don skor gyi rtsa ’dzin don tshan bcu gsum) described two practices as having risen under the rule of ’Gyur med rams rgyal (1747–1750): first, the appointing, by officials, of servants and family members to government offices notwithstanding the procedures of officials’ recruitment; second, the representation in the office by a servant. The ordinance reminds us that it is, according to old regulations, strictly forbidden and that only individuals appointed by the government could represent the government.

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28 Letter from the British Trade Agent, Gartok, Western Tibet, to the Superintendent, Hill States, Simla, dated the 15th September 1934 (PRO/FO/371/18107 ex. F7036/137/10).
29 Diary of the British Trade Agent, Gartok, dated the 16th September 1936 (IOR/L/P&S/12/4163/ P1081).
30 In 1908, it is the servant of the younger brother of the “Junior Garpon” at Spu rang who is in charge, cf. Letter from the Hospital Assistant Mohan Lall, Officiating British Trade Agent in Gartok, to the Assistant Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign Department, dated Gartok, the 25th April 1901 (IOR/L/P&S/10/150/1247).
32 Anonymous interview.
33 Anonymous interview.
The custom of having oneself represented by another person is certainly to be linked to another interesting aspect of Ganden phodrang service, the concurrent holding of several offices by a single official.

1.3. The concurrent holding of several offices

The reason why officials had themselves sometimes replaced by a family member or servant was actually often not to avoid the service of government: we read in a British report in 1935 that “Kusho Nyemo Malam”\(^{35}\) was appointed governor of Gyantse, and that in addition to this position, he was appointed secretary in the Council of Ministers. He stayed in Lhasa to hold this Council position, and his post as governor of Gyantse was held by his son-in-law, “Kusho Chiwang”, although the latter had not been appointed to this office.\(^{36}\) It is easy to understand how the concurrent holding of these two posts would be profitable. “Kusho Nyemo Malam” could live in the capital city and work in a prestigious office, while at the same time receive the incomes a rdzong dpon could usually expect from a rdzong, even if it was indirectly, through his son-in-law. Thus, the government did not turn a blind eye to this practice, but actually participated in it knowingly, since it appointed one official at the same time to several offices, often located far away from each other.

This phenomenon of the concurrent holding of several offices is very poorly described in the secondary literature, except for the position of governor of the eastern province (Tib. mdo spyi), which was generally given to a minister. As well, an official holding a particular permanent position could be sent away from his office to carry out a temporary mission, such as official guide (Tib. sne shan) to a visiting team, for instance,\(^{37}\) or to attend a military training course in India, or similar activities.

But in many cases described in the British archives, we find that two permanent offices were held at the same time by one official and there are no details as to the way the timetable was organized or the functions fulfilled. Just to give a couple of examples, out of many: in 1925, LUNG SHAR Rdo rje tshe rgyal was appointed general-in-chief of the army (Tib. dmag spyi) in addition to his office of rtis dpon or finance minister;\(^{38}\) in 1932, the aristocrat TSHES GSUM PHUN KHANG was promoted to the fourth rank and appointed Tibetan trade agent in Yatung in addition to his position as governor of Phag ri district.\(^{39}\) In this case, the closeness of

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35 Most probably a member of the SMAR LAM PA noble house whose estates were located in Snyemo.
36 Annual Report on the British Trade Agency, Gyantse, Tibet, for the year ending 31st March 1935 (IOR/L/P&S/12/4166/P3840).
38 Ibid., p. 17. He was dismissed from this second charge in 1931.
39 Annual Report of the British trade agency, Yatung, for the year ending March 31st 1933, from A. A. Russell, British trade agent, Yatung and Assistant to the Political officer in Sikkim (PRO/FO/371/17138 ex. F3334/3334/10).
the two office locations certainly made the concurrent holding of the two positions easier.

In 1941 Chos rgyal nyi ma Ka Shod Pa was appointed officer-in-charge of the Grwa bzhi hydroelectric factory in addition to his office of finance minister (Tib. rtsis dpon).40 In February 1951, Byams pa Ngag dbang was appointed magistrate of Lhasa (Tib. bsher dpang) in addition to his functions as assistant to the foreign office (Tib. phyi rgyal las khungs).41 During the same period, GsAR BYung Bsd nam stobs rgyas, in addition to his position as secretary to the Council of Ministers (Tib. bka’ drung), was appointed assistant in the tourism office.42

Two other situations are worth mentioning in particular. In one, an official exercised the functions of abbot of Gyantse monastery and at the same time held a government office, that of Tibetan trade agent in Gyantse.43 In the other, B Tsag Ser Kang also held two offices at the same time: one for the Ganden phodrang and the other one for the Tashi Lhunpo government. In 1915 he had been governor of Gamp a since at least 1903, and was also officially phyag mdzod (a position between treasurer and steward) of Tashi Lhunpo monastery.44

The reasons accounting for this situation are not clear. We can assume that it was partly the consequence of the increasing number of positions due to the creation of new offices from the reign of the thirteenth Dalai Lama onwards. But a lack of available officials does not seem to be the main reason, since we also know from the same archives that there was a significant amount of inactivity among officials, many of them holding the status of gzhung zhabs without having been appointed to any particular office. It might well have been due to a shortage of high ranking or experienced officials. According to one informant, the government was well aware of this situation and would have liked to stop it.45

In many cases, a rdzong dpon appointment was given in addition to another office and, in this particular case, the officials concerned always sent representatives.46

41 Ibid., p. 16.
42 Ibid., p. 17. According to the Who’s Who, he was bka’ shod, which is certainly a confusion, since the official concerned remembers well that he was bka’ drung. Handwritten notes added to the Who’s Who read as follows: “Since Feb. 51, in addition to his duties as kashag sho-pa, he has been acting as additional assistant in the tourism [hardly legible] Bureau.” I have found no other mention of a “Tourism Bureau” in this period. A Tibet Tourism Bureau was founded later, in 1979.
43 In 1933, the monk official Byams pa chos bzang, cf. Annual Report on the British trade agency, Gyantse, Tibet for the year ending 31st March 1934 (IOR/L/P&S/12/4166/P3566).
45 Anonymous interview.
46 Thus, the Who’s Who of 1915 states that Man spel Bsd nam rgyal po was appointed post officer (Tib. sbrags spyi) in addition to his “permanent position” as governor of Gting skyes, which is a five-day walk from Shigatse, cf. Chiefs and Leading Families in Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet, 1915, op. cit., p. 18. In 1940, SmOn GlIng Kun skyabs bsod nam stobs rgyas was
Actually, because of the nominal character or even, for most positions, the lack of any salary for the officials, a certain number of rdzong were granted to particular offices or officials in lieu of the salary. Giuseppe Tucci has underlined the fact that the government owned several estates which it gave to officials to ensure for them an income in kind.\(^{47}\) For example, ministers were sometimes paid in estates called bka’ gzhis (lit. “the estate of the minister”)\(^ {48}\) and other rdzong were systematically attributed to certain offices and positions. In these cases sending a representative was completely accepted and expected.\(^ {49}\)

On one occasion, when the government had some young officials attend a wireless course and was on the verge of creating the new position of officer-in-charge of the wireless service, the British agent observed:

“The wireless training course continues every day but it will be difficult for the government to make the position in this new field popular. Indeed, nobody in Tibet wants to have such a work, as it carries nothing but pay. As the salary of a Minister does not exceed more than 400 or 500 Rupees a year, the pay of a wireless operator will certainly be very inadequate as a living wage. I suggested that the Tibetan Government gives a district to anybody appointed wireless official, in order to make the position more attractive.”\(^ {50}\)

It is obvious that the Tibetan State considered the office of rdzong dpon as an official means of enrichment for its holder, a way of making up for the lack of salary.

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\(^{47}\) “To each official a holding was allotted corresponding to the rank held, which he managed to his own profit for the duration of his tenure. In some cases he might get a governmental loan on his nomination, enabling him to live to his rank, or to collect a handsome interest by investing its amount.”, G. Tucci, *To Lhasa and Beyond*, Snow Lion Publications. New York: Ithaca, 1983, p. 50.


\(^{49}\) These estates had to be given back to the government at the end of the tenure of the office. At the end of the 18th century, it seems that ministers customarily kept these estates in the family and the government had to remind them of the rule requiring that the estates be given back, cf. Article no. 27 of “The Twenty-nine-Article Ordinance for the More Efficient Governing of Tibet” (Tib. Gong ma’i bka’ bral legs srol gsar ’dzugs don tshan nyer dgu ) of 1793, Blo bzang ’Phrin las Dung dkar, *op. cit.*, p. 128–129.

\(^{50}\) *Lhasa letter for the week ending the 16th January 1944 from Major G. Sheriff, Additional Assistant, Political Officer Sikkim, Officer in charge, British Mission, Lhasa* (IOR/L/P&S/12/4201).
The common practice, in these cases, of having oneself represented by somebody of one’s own choice seems to imply a link between the official and his office not unlike ownership of property, since the official was allowed, to a certain extent, to decide what to do with it. Other facts reinforce the feeling that the office was sometimes and in some regards considered the private property of the official. The British describe an extreme case, that of a governor of a western district who simply refused to have himself replaced at the end of his term of office:

“The new Jongpon, who has not come as yet, has sent his servant to assume the charge of Jongpon from the servant of the previous Jongpon. The next acting Jongpon arrived in Daba a week before us. […] The former acting Jongpon refused to give the charge this year. Upon this the new acting Jongpon reported the matter to the court of the Garpons who deputed their servant to ask the former acting Jongpon to hand over the charge at once. But this acting Jongpon did not care for the orders of the Garpons and refused to hand over the charge till next year (Tibetan), in order to have the fruits of taxes of the year. This is the example of the administration in Western Tibet.”

Other elements of a financial order—such as the leasing of the position and what can be qualified as a kind of purchasing of the position—which imply the enrichment of an official thanks to his status as servant of the government, back up the idea of the partly patrimonial character of an office in the Ganden phodrang administration and lead us at the same time to envisage the whole relationship between the official and his position in a more complex way.

2. Financial transactions regarding the office

2.1. The leasing of positions

Another practice that stresses the idea of a property-like link to the official position is the leasing of the position: i.e., contracting one’s post to another official in exchange for an income, which again gave an official the opportunity of holding several offices at the same time. In both the practices of having oneself represented by somebody else (Tib. ngo tshab) and leasing one’s position (Tib. bogs ma), somebody other than the official initially and officially appointed by the government is acting in that position, but they are formally different.

Two examples show that the leasing of office existed from the beginning of the period under scrutiny. In 1901, the first Tibetan official that John Claude White, the Political Officer in Sikkim, met, at the border between India and Tibet, had, according to the Tibetan official himself, taken this office on contract. He explained to White that he had committed himself by contract to pay an allowance for his office.

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51 Letter of the British trade agent, Gartok, dated 3rd/9th August 1931 (IOR/L/P&S/12/4163/P7900).

52 Letter from John Claude White, Esquire, Political officer of Sikkim to C.R. Marindin, Esquire, Commissioner, Rajshahi, dated Tangu, the 19th August 1901 (IOR/L/P&S/7/137/P1177).
Tibetan official was the then governor of Gam pa. A later example is KA SHOD PA Chos rgyal nyi ma. From 1938 to 1942, when he was already finance minister (Tib. rtsis dpon) and additionally appointed officer-in-charge of the Grwa bzhi hydroelectric factory in 1941, he contracted the office of governor of Phag ri from the incumbent, 'CHUM BKRAS GLING Bsd nams dngos grub. KA SHOD PA Chos rgyal nyi ma then sent a representative\(^{53}\) to occupy the position in southern Tibet, at the border with India.\(^{54}\) Later, in 1948, according to a *Who's Who*, he also took on lease, while he was minister, the post of governor of Nag tshang in northern Tibet, a position to which the aristocrat CHA PA Bskal bzang dbang 'dus had just been appointed.\(^{55}\) At the beginning, CHA PA had sent one of his servants but then decided to give the position on contract to KA SHOD PA Chos rgyal nyi ma against a “rental” fee (Tib. bogs ma). KA SHOD PA Chos rgyal nyi ma was interested in the position as he was engaged in trade in this area. CHA PA Bskal bzang dbang 'dus himself held another important office in Lhasa, in which he was occupied full-time, in charge (Tib. do dam pa) of the agricultural office (Tib. so nam las khungs).\(^{56}\) This kind of arrangement was quite common in the administration and it was only rarely necessary to ask permission for it from the Dalai Lama or regent.

### 2.2. The office, a purchasable and negotiable good?

Some Tibetan autobiographies recount the degree to which family connections could sometimes determine success in getting a position.\(^{57}\) Nominal gifts were customarily given when an official sent or presented a request in order to get a position. But it is well known that the end of the period witnessed abuses in this domain. Let us examine now a practice which was very much criticized by Tibetans during the period and which seems to have reached incredible proportions during the period of regency. Some western travellers noticed the importance of bribes in the Tibetan administration.

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54 *Annual Report on the British trade agency at Yatung, for the year ending 31st March 1939* (PRO/FO/371/23525 ex F5776/5776/10), and *Annual report on the Yatung trade agency for the year 1941–1942* (IOR/L/P&S/12/4166/P4559).


Frederick Spencer Chapman even declared that this practice was so deeply rooted in the system that it had become a necessary part of it.58

This phenomenon, which cannot be ignored, surely evolved during the period, with moments displaying a greater amount of bribery than others. The different aspects, social functions and evaluations by the actors of what was described as bribery by British informants and also denounced as such by Tibetans will not be discussed here.59 However, there is one interesting aspect which can be linked to our interrogations regarding the intermingling of private and public spheres and the partly patrimonial nature of the office or official position in the Tibetan State: i.e., the existence of what could be termed an “unofficial market of official positions” during certain periods of the first half of the 20th century, particularly during the regency period.

In Tibet, we could perhaps consider certain practices of bribery at the highest level of the State as a form of selling of official positions. The office, in the government, at least during the 1940s, and for the highest positions mainly, seems to have been considered as a purchasable and negotiable good. Let us examine the phenomenon as described by the British. In 1945, for instance, they learn through a “reliable source” that the governor of Gyantse, yab gzhis PHUN KHANG, had received an offer from the regent to be appointed head of eighteen districts, but that he refused to give the regent the necessary bribe to secure the position.60

During the 1940s, the vacancy of the office of minister gave rise to what can only be described as an auction sale: the candidate who got the position was the one who

58 F.S. Chapman, *Lhasa: the Holy City*. New Delhi: Bodhi Leaves Corporation, 1992 [first print: London 1938], p. 83: “In Tibet the State owns practically all the land, and farms it out to the noble families on condition that they supply one or more officials, depending on the value of the estate, for government employment. Bribery is of course rife and is so ingrained in the system that it has become an indispensable part of it. A young official pays a senior one to put in a good word for him. Huge presents are received by those who have in their power the selection of candidates for a vacant post. Bribes are even paid to spread bad reports of rivals, so there is little feeling of security for a Lhasa official. But this system is tacitly accepted by the Government, who finds it convenient not to have to pay salaries.” The phenomenon is also described by Hugh Richardson, who states that the major part of an official’s income consists of “bribes and other perquisites”, cf. H.E. Richardson, *op. cit.*., p. 94. Melvyn Goldstein also mentions these practices, cf. M.C. Goldstein, *op. cit.*, p. 159.


60 Gyantse News Report from R.F. Grist, the Assistant Political officer, Gyantse to the Political officer in Sikkim for the period ending the 29th November 1945 (PRO/FO/371/53613 ex. 277/71/10).
agreed to pay a certain amount of money. According to information available in British archives, in a few cases the amount was fixed and known by all, while in others candidates offered stakes and the office went to the highest bidder.

Normally, the process for the appointment of a minister, in the event of vacancy of the office, was as follows: a list of candidates recommended by the other ministers in charge was sent to the Dalai Lama or the regent, who could take it into account or not before designating the future minister. But, in 1943\textsuperscript{61} and 1945\textsuperscript{62} especially, the vacancy of a position of minister apparently produced a spectacular auction sale.

The reason why bribery is of interest to a researcher is certainly not the need to judge an administration. Bribery is one of the most widely spread and shared phenomena among administrations in the world and throughout history. But the study of this type of transaction leads one to think of the venality of offices as it developed in European countries in pre-modern times, between the 16\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries, and especially in France where its legal aspect was more pronounced than elsewhere. This other model could perhaps help in looking at the Tibetan situation from a different angle. In his book on the venality of offices in France, Roland Mousnier describes the office as having the characteristics of a patrimonial good, a private

\textsuperscript{61} In 1943, \textit{Zur Khang dza sag} was said to have become minister after having given a bribe to the regent Taktra, cf. \textit{News Report from the British mission, Lhasa, to Political Officer in Sikkim, dated 29\textsuperscript{th} June 1944} (PRO/FO/371/41588 ex. F4577/38/10), and \textit{Yatung news report for the period ending the 15\textsuperscript{th} June 1945} from the British trade agent, Yatung and Assistant to the Political officer in Sikkim, Yatung, Tibet (IOR/L/P&S/12/4208/P3452). If true, it would have been a first for this regent who originally had made the battle against corruption his main concern, cf. \textit{Lhasa letter for the week ending the 4\textsuperscript{th} July 1943} from Major Sheriff, Additional Assistant, Political officer of Sikkim, Officer in charge, British mission, Lhasa (IOR/L/P&S/12/4201).

\textsuperscript{62} Lhasa letter for the week ending the 13\textsuperscript{th} May 1945 from the Additional Assistant, Political officer in Sikkim, Officer in charge, British mission, Lhasa (IOR/L/P&S/12/4201), Yatung news report for the period ending the 31\textsuperscript{st} May 1945 from the British trade agent, Yatung and Assistant to the Political officer in Sikkim, Yatung, Tibet (IOR/L/P&S/12/4208/P3117). “The Tibetan Trade Agent, Yatung, has dispatched one ‘Adung’ (special messenger) [Tib. \textit{a drung}] with one sealed cover addressed to his son-in-law Samdrup Photrang Theiji (\textit{Revised Who’s Who} p. 37) at Lhasa, with instructions to deliver the sealed cover within seven days. The sealed cover is said to contain an advance hand receipt approximately for four lakhs of rupees to be handed over to the Regent as a stake for Shap-peship. He also suggested to his son-in-law to increase the stake should any other candidate endeavour to increase it. There is rumour that Lhalu Se (\textit{Revised Who’s Who} p. 24) one of the candidates for Shap-peship has also given a hand receipt to the Regent of the same amount offered to him by Surkhang Shap-pe in securing the appointment to Shap-pe in 1943”, cf. \textit{Yatung news report for the period ending the 15\textsuperscript{th} July 1945} from the British trade agent, Yatung and Assistant to the Political Officer in Sikkim, Yatung, Tibet (IOR/L/P&S/12/4208/P3886). For a discussion of the political context in which these events took place, see M.C. Goldstein, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 449; \textit{Lhasa letter for the week ending the 29\textsuperscript{th} July 1945} from the Additional Assistant, Political Officer Sikkim, Officer in charge, British Mission Lhasa (IOR/L/P&S/12/4202).
property that you can hand down or hand on, especially after 1604, with an essential feature, the confusion of public power and private property.\textsuperscript{63}

One common contextual feature of the first occurrence of the venality of offices would be the critical condition of the State’s finances. Nonetheless, it is obvious that there are important differences between the government office in Tibet and the government office in Europe (insofar as we can put these offices into one category, i.e., European). First, the profits of the sale of offices were not used to refloat public finances, as was the case in France, but the private finances of the regent (in the case described) or individuals in the government. Second, the office, as it was defined in Europe, was held for life, whereas in Tibet, theoretically, most of the offices were temporarily given and only the highest ones were given for life. Last but not least, in Tibet, the money paid to obtain a position was really considered a bribe, and although the practice seems to have been widespread during certain periods, it was not normal procedure. It was always considered abnormal and remained, even if well known, unofficial. It was clearly opposed to the highest standard of morality in the service of the State and considered as an unfortunate drift of the Tibetan administration. Officials who did not indulge in these practices were highly praised.

In fact, the comparison could only be made with what also existed in pre-modern Europe and many countries, and has been termed a “private venality”\textsuperscript{64} or “customary venality”,\textsuperscript{65} in opposition to “public venality” and “legal venality” of government office. Lastly, all these practices implying an underlying representation of the office as a private good, and the enrichment of private individuals through their public office or their position, need to be put in perspective with other elements, the broader context of the holding of office in the Ganden phodrang administration, which not only implied not getting a proper salary, as we said, but also meant being responsible for the State to the point of sometimes putting up one’s private money to ensure the functioning of the State.

\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Ibid}.
3. THE FINANCING OF THE STATE THROUGH OFFICIALS’ PRIVATE FINANCES

3.1. Officials’ expenditures

We come now to a particular feature of the Ganden phodrang administration, the input of private money into the State by officials.66 To begin with, the holding of an office very often meant great personal expenditures, for daily dress, ceremonial dress, giving parties when one was promoted, and so on. Moreover, the highest offices involved maintaining a costly sumptuous daily lifestyle.

Another aspect, which still has to be thoroughly studied, is more significant: an official could be appointed to an office with its finance in deficit and he was then obliged to resort to his private resources in order to make up the deficit of the public finances.

This phenomenon was very common in China under the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) as underlined by Pierre-Étienne Will.67 In his Memorandum on the Tibetan government written in 1906, Charles Bell, the British representative, describes the situation of the Receivers of Barley Flour (Tib. rtsam bzhes pa), who were the storekeepers of the State:

“They have charge of the Government barley, barley-flour, wheat, peas, meat, oil and some silver. They issue their supplies on receiving an order from the Council or from the Labrang treasury. [...] They are bound to meet indents whether they have the goods in store or not, and these officers are always put to loss. When completing their term of office which lasts three years, they put in a petition stating that they have incurred heavy loss. They are generally rewarded afterwards by being appointed to a profitable Jong. They receive no pay; they may be said to farm this revenue and always at a loss to themselves.”68

A study made by the anthropologist Paljor Tsarong confirms Charles Bell’s description. He mentions the fact that only rich officials were appointed to this position of rtsam bzhes pa.69 In addition to this, a study of the administration made by Dge rgyas pa Bstan ’dzin rdo rje allows one to observe that officials of a higher and higher rank were appointed to this office during the period,70 which could also be

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66 It happens in other administrations that some positions require its holders to put in private funds, but, to our knowledge, it was not as widespread as in the Tibetan administration.
68 C.A. Bell, op. cit., p. 12.
70 Bstan ’dzin rdo rje Dge rgyas pa, “De snga’i Bod sa gnas srid gzhung gi srid ’dzin sgrig gzhi”, Bod ljong zhib ’jug, no. 3, p. 129.
linked to the obligation of meeting public expenditures with one’s private money. This situation happened in other offices as well.  

3.2. The private financing of public functions

In addition to the expenditures mentioned above, officials—in turn and on a compulsory basis—were expected to finance and organize official functions and parties, which also incurred great expenditures.

Officials from the fourth rank and above generally once in their career, sometimes more often, organized a party. Council ministers would organize, in turn, the bka’ shag thugs spro72 and lay officials would organize, also in turn, the lay official party (Tib. drung spyi dbyar skyid). The organization of this party was a ruinous affair, as several accounts evidence: there were, on average, two hundred guests, who each came with two servants, which amounts to a total of six hundred people.73 When it was the turn of bla phyag ’Phreng ring to organize this party in 1943, he estimated that he needed nine hundred eggs per day for the six hundred guests, just for the making of the thug pa (Tibetan noodle soup). According to the custom, breakfast, lunch and dinner were served. Based on financial considerations, ’Phreng ring assessed that a single official could not undertake this function more than once in his life.74

In addition to these two occasions there were also public functions, which two newly appointed officials of the fourth rank would finance in turn, such as the lay state ceremonies taking place after the Smon lam chen mo.75 After the 16th day of the first month, the two aristocrat officials who had been appointed ya sor khri pa or spyi khyab ya sor trained their troops for a few days in preparation for a military parade in 17th century dress.76 The two ya sor khri pa took charge of the organization and the financing of the parade which was extremely costly.77 With the help of their relatives they had to start preparing everything a long time ahead:78

71 Anonymous interview.
75 See a very detailed description of this festival in J. Karsten, op. cit.
76 Lhasa Mission, Typescript, August 1936 (Fols. 1–13), p. 44 (MS. Or. Richardson 2, Bodleian Library, Oxford).
77 Lhasa letter for the week ending the 1st December 1946 from H.E. Richardson, British Trade Agent, Gyantse and Officer in charge, British Mission, Lhasa (IOR/L/P&S/12/4202).
78 Dbyangs can sgrol dkar Tsha rong, Sde dpon mi drag gi sras mo gzhon nu ma zhig gis sge’u
“A different set of costly and elaborate clothes has to be worn on each of the seven days of the ceremony; special uniforms have to be provided each day for a large retinue who must also wear coral rosaries and gold bracelets; young ladies of good families have to be enlisted as maids of honour and adorned with masses of valuable jewelry; extensive entertainments have to be given. Few families could take this on without borrowing much of the finery from their friends. There was no escaping the duty and it was a matter of pride that everything should be of dazzling perfection.”79

They would spend at least 15,000 rupees each, according to British archives.80

All these parties were ruinously expensive, as the British archives and Tibetan aristocrat autobiographies underline. A number of officials went into debt while organizing them and the government and the officials began taking various steps, like creating collective funds (Tib. sphyi ngul) or forbidding excessive expenses through sumptuary laws to improve the situation. In 1944 for instance, the Tibetan government decided to enforce sumptuary laws forbidding the use of very expensive imported food items during official parties:

“Sumptuary laws against the use of imported foodstuffs and drink were put into force at the Kashag’s official party. No Chinese delicacies, imported alcohol or even Indian tea were to be used. On the day that foreign missions were entertained Indian tea was served, as a concession. These parties had become far too extravagant and competitive and the new restrictions are sensible.”81

In 1945, a collective fund was created to avoid officials bankrupting themselves while using their personal funds for organizing official parties. The idea was as follows: Each time an official was promoted to a higher position, he would give a certain limited amount of money, 250 ngul-sang for instance. An office took charge of this money and gave it as a loan to traders and kept the interest. Part of this money was used during the Smon lam festival in order to help the ya sor, and the other part for the organisation of official parties.82

According to another witness, it was TSHA RONG Zla bzang dgra ’dul who came up with the idea and who, as early as 1934 or 1935, organized this collective fund. It was entrusted to a committee which invested or lent the money and used the interest for the organization of official parties and kept the concerned officials from going too far

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79 Lhasa Mission, Typescript, August 1936 (Fols. 1–13), p. 44 (MS. Or. Richardson 2, Bodleian Library, Oxford).
80 Lhasa letter for the week ending the 19th March 1944 from Major G. Sheriff, Additional Assistant, Political Officer in Sikkim, Officer in charge, British Mission, Lhasa (IOR/L/P&S/12/4201).
82 Anonymous interview.
into debt. Each time an official took charge of the organization of an official party, he
would add some money and the capital would increase. Thus it was easier later on for
officials to organize these parties and the funds were all the more welcome with the
much increased price of foodstuffs.83

A great deal of solidarity and reciprocity between aristocrat families was displayed:
when an official was designated to organize the function or party, the whole family
and network of friends would help him.

3.3. Interdependency of officials and the State

From this whole picture, we can see that private and public money seem not to have
always formed two clearly delimited spheres. The expenditures incurred in the
exercise of official duties and the lack or insufficiency of salary are reasons that at
least partly account for the search for personal profit, or simply repayment of private
expenses, in the service of the State. The very fact that officials accepted that it was
their duty to meet public expenses with their private money in offices lacking finances
or in deficit, or in organizing official parties and public functions, indicates a sense of
responsibility of the official regarding the State. This sense of responsibility on the
part of officials may be linked to a strong commonality of interests of the officials and
the State. This could perhaps explain why a situation of tension—the fact that some
of the administration’s rules were not respected and the intermingling of private
interests with public service, but also the serving of public interest with private
money—which could be either detrimental or beneficial to the well-functioning of
the State and to the well-being of aristocratic houses, endured from the beginning of
the Ganden phodrang administration to its end.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we could first say that in its functioning during the first half of the 20th
century the Ganden phodrang administration met with a certain number of difficulties
in enforcing regulations that had existed for centuries and which regarded the clear
differentiation between public service and personal or family interests. These
difficulties cannot be considered particular to the Ganden phodrang administration.
Regulations of this type and the difficulties to implement them are present in every
administration at all times in any country. Neither can they even be considered to be
present to a greater degree in pre-1959 Tibet than in other countries’ administrations.
They are nonetheless of interest to the researcher insofar as they illustrate the ongoing
difficulty of the public sphere to achieve autonomy from private interests and
networks, even when written laws and regulations theoretically ensure their

83 Anonymous interview.
application. It is hence of great importance to understand the likely reasons accounting for the tenacity of these practices as well as the State’s responses to them.

The separation between private and public spheres has often been thought of as a characteristic feature of the modern State. It is probably for this reason that British archives so widely and precisely give an account of the practices described in this paper. The British representatives were clearly fascinated by practices which seemed to them incompatible with public service in their understanding of it. As well, they had a direct interest in describing these practices insofar as they could be presented as a justification for the British near-colonialist enterprise in Tibet and their alleged help in modernizing the country. Hence the possible overrepresentation of all these practices in the British archives, compared with the probable real extent to which they were engaged in by officials in the service of the Tibetan administration.

Moreover, a number of historians challenge the relevance of the distinction between public and private in other periods of European history and in other societies. For instance, Paul Veyne, in his study of the Roman Empire, has underlined that the “ideal of the State”, as he puts it, is never incompatible with the venality of offices, because this ideal needs not to be disinterested. To him, the distinction between public and private is only conventional and he describes the administration of the Roman Empire as a public service which itself procured private advantages. Several studies show that the distribution between private business and public duties is a very contemporary one, and, perhaps, a very Western one.

This idea would lead to the argument that one of the reasons for the close interweaving of the private and public spheres in pre-modern administrations or in other cultures was the non-relevance of the separation between the private and public spheres. This might be true to a limited extent. Yet it is clear from the reading of written regulations that from the beginning of the functioning of the Ganden Phodrang, the government at the highest level was well aware of the danger represented by these practices, and tried to separate the two areas. In this respect, the decrees and regulations

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85 P. Veyne, “Clientèle et corruption au service de l’État : la vénalité des offices dans le Bas-Empire romain”, Annales. Économies, sociétés, civilisations, vol. 36, no. 3, 1981, p. 339–360. In this article, the author explains that the officials he studies “adhere to themselves when they serve their own importance by serving the prince and hence they consider themselves disinterested”. He adds that “patronage and business did not prevent our officials from having the ‘ideal of State’, considering they had to serve the emperor even if they stole from him; amateurishness, corruption and venality of offices did no more to prevent it. Because the ideal of public service is no more disinterested than any other and goes easily with baksheesh and the trafficking in public power. [...] In order to serve, one has to invest interests in the service, and, by definition, an investment is egocentric.” [my translation from the French]
always enjoin officials to stick to the “old custom” (Tib. lugs srol rnying pa ltar/ sngar lugs ltar) and condemned the mixing of public and private interests as illegal.87

Instances are far too numerous in the official decrees for all of them to be cited. To give one example, in 1751, “The Thirteen-Article Ordinance for the More Efficient Governing of Tibet” reminded cabinet ministers that in order to avoid the situation where “personal considerations interfere with their execution of public duties”88 and to ensure that they act equitably (Tib. “drang bzhag gi sgo nas bkod pa byed pa”), ministers should handle their official business in their government offices according to the old regulations, instead of holding public business in their private homes, as they apparently started to do during the rule of Pholanas.89 In the same ordinance, the ninth article reminded officials that “people should not be held as private property” (Tib. “mi ser sogs la rang ’tshams kyi bdag bzung byed mi ’jug pa ’i bab ’brel ’dug”).90 The argument of the irrelevance of the differentiation between public and private seems not to be pertinent concerning the Tibetan government where a clear distinction between what pertains to the private (Tib. sger) and the public (Tib. spyi) has always been made.

Therefore, to answer the question asked at the beginning of this paper, it would not be appropriate to speak of any legal patrimonial nature of position or office in the Ganden phodrang administration. Nevertheless, there was, to a limited extent, a de facto and tolerated patrimonial attitude towards the office by officials in the practices of the institutions. Thus, we can only suggest that some of the practices described above—which were, from very early times, considered illegal—were tolerated (like the hereditary handing-down of the office, an official being represented by somebody else in the office, the leasing of the official position, and so on) for two reasons.

First, as with administrations elsewhere, the State found no efficient way to eradicate them thoroughly. In this respect, another observation might be added which is linked to the very nature of the Tibetan government and an inherent fragility due to the system of reincarnation of its spiritual and temporal leader, the Dalai Lama. Why

87 There has always been, throughout the existence of the Ganden phodrang, a system for demoting and dismissing officials from the government service when they acted in an inappropriate way or infringed the laws. For the 20th century, see A. Travers, “Risk and social mobility among the aristocracy: a study of the demotion and dismissal cases in the careers of the Dga’ ldan pho brang officials at the beginning of the 20th century (1885–1952)”, in Brandon Dotson et al. (eds), Contemporary Visions in Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the First International Seminar of Young Tibetologists, London, 9–13 August 2007, Chicago: Serindia, 2009, p. 363–381.
88 Blo bzang ’Phrin las Dung dkar, op. cit., p. 106. See the Tibetan original in Bod kyi las don byed sgor gyi rtsha ’dzin don tshan bcu gsum, in Nor bu bsam ’phel, op. cit., p. 143.
89 “Bka’ blon thams cad spyi khang bka’ shag tu ma phyin par sger khang du las ka byas ’dug”, ibid.
90 Article no. 9 of “The Thirteen-Article Ordinance For the More Efficient Governing of Tibet”, Blo bzang ’Phrin las Dung dkar, op. cit., p. 110; Bod kyi las don byed sgor gyi rtsha ’dzin don tshan bcu gsum, in Nor bu bsam ’phel, op. cit., p. 149.
is it that although the government was well aware of the existence of a certain number of these practices, and although it forbade them repeatedly, they persisted through the whole existence of the Ganden phodrang, apparently rising cyclically again and again? The periods during which these practices seem to have been most prevalent appear to be periods of internal political troubles, mostly during regencies, during the minority of the Dalai Lama. It is likely that strict adherence to the rules and ethic of the public service was favoured by the charisma of the Dalai Lama whereas regents, due to their own conduct or to their lack of charisma, could not ensure such coherence between the rule and the practice in the public service.

Second, another crucial reason accounting for the tolerating of some of these practices is surely to be found in the problem of nominal or non-existent salaries, the deficiency of the State’s finances which sometimes encouraged the financing of the State by private individuals, and the strong interdependency between the State and its officials, all of which somehow blurred the existing differentiation between the public and the private.

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