

In memory of Blo gros chos mtsho: feminine and local politics in modern Kham

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There has been, recently, growing interest in Tibetan gender discourses and their socio-spatial practices. Yet, issues of femininity and local politics have not received adequate attention in modern Kham studies, whose enunciations will deepen our understanding of the essential fluidity of Sino-Tibetan frontiers.

This paper locates modern Kham politics at the individual level. It discusses Blo gros chos mtsho's marital relationship to the Han Chinese geographer-cum- ethnologist, Ren Naiqiang and its political ramifications in Kham during the Republican era. By reading Blo gros' political propositions at the National Assembly in 1947, her personal memoir, and Ren Naiqiang's recollections after her death in 1949, I explore Blo gros' participations in "women's work" of Xikang (Sikang) and in minorities' constitutional representations in Republican China. I also discuss her contributions to Ren's political and scholarly work in Kham and her narrations of tragic involvements of the Rgya re family of Nyagrong in local, provincial and national politics.

As a Tibetan woman from an influential Khampa family, and wife of a famous Chinese bureaucratic scholar, Blo gros' personal and political career sheds much light on complexities of Tibetan gender issues, mediated by local/national politics, ethnic relationships and intercultural appropriations. An inquiry of this kind of hybridization also necessitates a critical intervention in the Chinese or Tibetan historiography emphasizing "purity" of its historical and heroic figures in legitimizing a coherent nationalist ideology.