Nepal's Gorkha rulers established formal relations with the Qing Empire only after waging war in 1788 and 1791 against her protectorate, Tibet. In the second war, Nepal confirmed the Qing military expedition that crossed the Himalayas to protect Tibet against Nepalese troops. Finally, a truce was established between the Qing government and Nepal that resulted in Nepal becoming a new tributary member of the Qing Imperial Tributary System.

What led to the wars between Nepal and Tibet?
Most scholars have simplistically focused on the coinage issue as a cause of the wars. In these wars, Qing (China) was directly involved. Chinese military officers kept records on wars during their expedition period. "Qinding Kuoerxajilu" is compiled from those records and does not mention coinage issue as a cause of war. Not only Chinese sources, but also British sources do not support coinage issue. Therefore coinage issue could not be taken as cause for the wars.

What could be the reason if coinage issue is negated? Object of my present study is to redefine the reasons of wars. In the mid-18th century, Nepal emerged as a military power under Gorkha Kings, and this became a cause for the war between Nepal and Tibet. In order to give analytical treatment to these wars, the present study is divided into eight chapter including of introductory and conclusion.

The introductory chapter focuses on logic put by earlier scholars. Earlier scholars have cited the coinage issue as the main cause of war. Their logic was Jayaparakash Malla from Kantipur and Ranjit Malla from Bhaktapur han minted badly debased coins and exported them to Tibet to gain military expenses to fight with the Gorkha power. In this chapter, an effort will be made to show that Tibet had not imported debased coins. Verification of this fact is presented with reliance on Chinese and English source materials. Finally, after supporting the view that the coinage issue was not the central one, this introductory chapter presents the thesis that Nepal's territorial expansion was the primary cause for the wars between Nepal and Tibet.

Chapter one deals with the military activities of the Gorkha king Prithvi Narayan Shah, in trying to control the long distance Trans-Himalayan Trade running through the Kathmandu Valley. It also discusses the policies he instituted and measures he implemented to unify the principalities he subjugated. It narrates the outcome of his control over Trans-Himalayan Trade, foreign traders and the Valley itself; and it explains the reasons why Gorkha expanded in easterly and westerly directions. It outlines the policy developed by Gorkha for further territorial expansion that threatened Tibet and Sikkim. Finally, this chapter shows how the activities and goals of Gorkha contributed to the first war between Nepal and Tibet.
Chapter Two deals with the entry of the East India Company into Trans-Himalayan Trade as a result of Gorkha’s territorial expansions. It discusses how the Bhutanese war with Kuch-Bihar gave the East India Company an opportunity to make its military intervention in a Himalayan country. It explains the reasons for the East India Company becoming involved in this war and how their involvement led to the cementing of closer relations between the British East India Company and Tibet, whose rapprochement created great alarm and concern among the Gorkhas. This chapter also highlights how the newly developed relations between Tibet and the East India Company contributed indirectly to the first war between Nepal and Tibet.

Chapter Three discusses the structure of Trans-Himalayan Trade and its significance for pre-unified Nepal, surrounding countries, and traders. It specifically deals with the role of the Kathmandu Valley in Trans-Himalayan Trade during the period of pre-unified Nepal; and it summarizes the history of this economic activity, explaining why the Kathmandu Valley became an entrepôt for this trade. This chapter also focuses on the relationship between Trans-Himalayan Trade and unified Nepal, and its newly formed policies towards this trade and their negative impact on Tibet. It analyzes how and why Tibet reacted to New Nepal in light of the constraints that Nepal imposed on Trans-Himalayan Trade. Lastly, it narrates Nepal’s failure to fulfill its obligations to regularize trade between Nepal and Tibet, which became one of the reasons for the war between Nepal and Tibet.

Chapter Four discusses the factors that motivated both countries to plunge into war. Firstly, it examines the collapse of the political structure of pre-unified Nepal and how this resulted in Tibetans losing their historical friends among the rulers of the former principalities. This led to a serious attenuation of diplomatic relations, which inhibited the ability of Tibetans to develop amicable ties with New Nepal and contributed to a breakdown in communications. Secondly, this chapter considers the Gorkha policy of turning unified Nepal into a Hindu nation, and how this further alienated the Tibetans, who are strict Buddhists. Thirdly, it discusses the Tibetan policy of prohibiting salt exports to Nepal, which was an economic embargo intended to constrain Nepalese military activity. This embargo was perceived as cold-hearted by the Nepalese and contributed to their decision to wage war against Tibet. Fourthly, this chapter discusses the Qing Imperial Residents in Lhasa and their lack of effectiveness in dealing with foreign affairs concerning Nepalese matters. It was a well-known fact that Lhasa was under the influence of the Qing Empire at that time. A description is given of how and why Nepal attempted to establish contact with the Imperial Residents in Lhasa, and the limited results of this effort. The misunderstanding of Nepalese affairs by the Imperial Residents led the Nepalese to mistakenly conclude that Qing influence in Tibet was not as significant as was commonly believed, which emboldened the Nepalese to wage war. Lastly, this chapter discusses the exile in Nepal of the influential Tibetan, Shamarpama Lama, and his political influence on Nepal’s military invasion. A corollary is highlighted regarding the ability of Shamarpama Lama to serve as a source of motivation for the Nepalese ruler, Bahadur Shah, who also had a similar experience of living in exile.

Chapter Five deals with the first war of 1788 between Nepal and Tibet. It begins by discussing how the war started, and it provides a description of Nepalese military activities in Tibet during the invasion. It includes a detailed narration of the Nepalese intrusion, their retreat from the front lines back to the border, and the negotiation of the treaty. It discusses the main goals of the Qing military expedition and the actual events that occurred at the end of the war, which theretofore have been primarily preserved in
Chinese historical records that have not been translated into western languages. It analyses the insufficient steps taken by Qing imperial military officers to impress upon the Nepalese the power of the Qing Empire, despite the Emperor’s clearly stated order to force the Nepalese to recognize and submit themselves to him. This failure on the part on the military officers resulted from the fact that, although they were directly involved in the military campaign, they avoided participating in the treaty negotiations at the end of the first war. In the opposite, they allowed Nepal to assume the role of the victor by imposing treaty terms on Tibet that included reparations. This lack of Qing forcefulness in overseeing the treaty negotiations displayed a weakness of resolve and lack of influence over Tibetan affairs that contributed to the Nepalese having a heightened confidence in their subsequent dealings with Tibet and in their ability to wage war a second time.

Chapter Six deals with the second war of 1791 between Nepal and Tibet, as well as with the Qing military expedition across the Himalayas into Nepalese territory. This chapter explains why Nepal waged war again with Tibet, and it provides a detailed narrative of the military engagement, including the attack on the Sakia monastery, the plundering of the Tashilhunpo monastery, and the Nepalese army’s immediate retreat therefore. It analyses why the Qing Emperor provided military support to Tibet and details how the Nepalese engaged in combat with the Qing army. It further discusses the circumstances under which both the Nepalese and Qing became willing to enter into peace talks. Finally, it describes how the Qing army withdrew from Nepal and returned to China.

This final conclusion chapter ends by providing concluding comments about the analysis contained in the previous chapters. This chapter points out to the change that emerged in the 18th century Nepal, that was because of process of nation building necessitated it. For example, in the process of nation building, Gorkha rulers wished to recover the traditional territories of Nepal in Sikkim and Tibet as ‘Nepal’ kings. For it, they transferred their Gorkha nationalism to new Nepal nationalism. At the same time, internally, Gorkha kings also wished to unify diversified Nepalese by the spiritual ties of Hinduism. Similarly, for the unification of loose domestic economy, they adopted the use of purely minted new coins instead of old debased Malla silver coins. For maintaining unified Nepal intact, Gorkha kings established and maintained outstanding armies, which they trained after English way that required new sources of income. Accordingly, Gorkha rulers targeted foreign traders and new land for tax income. Lastly, their nation building activities required changes in pattern of relationship with Tibet and the East India Company as well as in traditional Tibetan-Indian Trade structure to a large extent. But these changes came out to be unacceptable to the Tibetan authorities and foreign traders engaging in the Trans-Himalayan Trade. At last, war became inevitable.