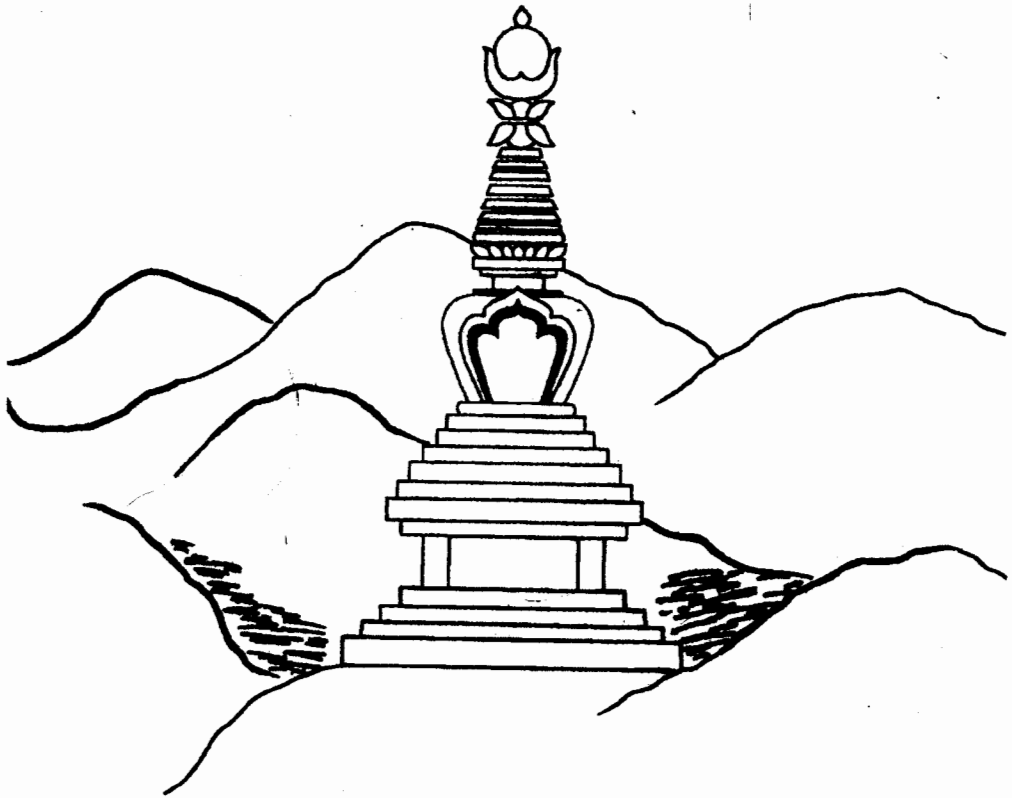


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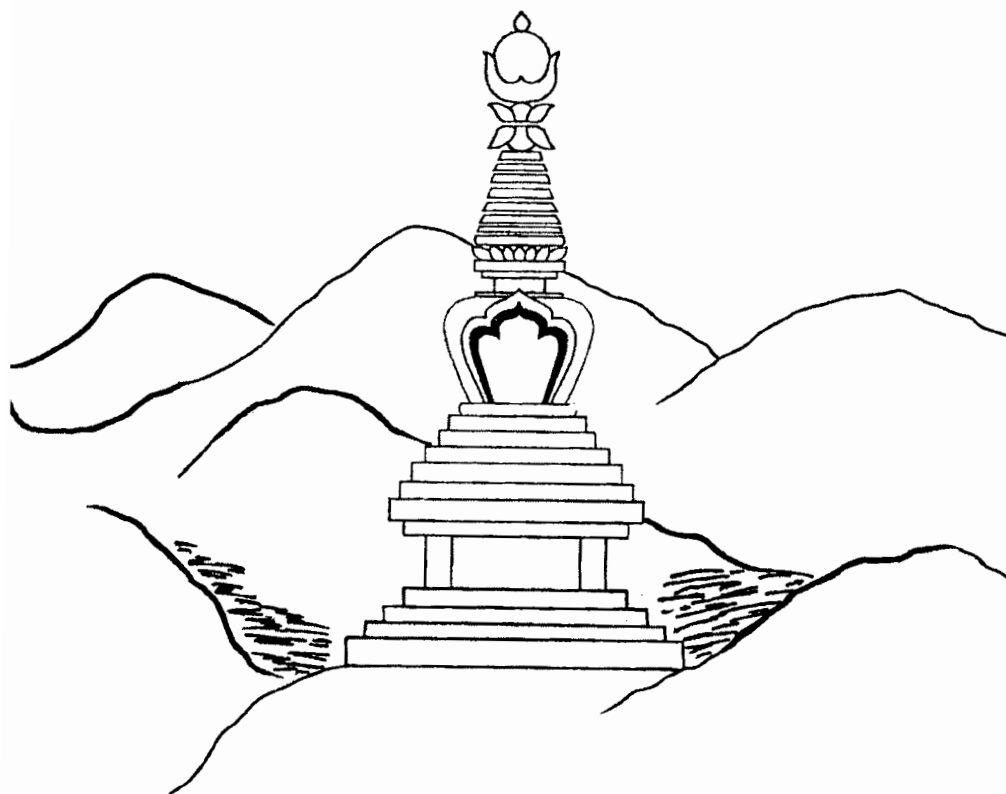
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NOVEMBER 2003

NAMGYAL INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY
GANGTOK, SIKKIM

The Bulletin of Tibetology seeks to serve the specialist as well as the general reader with an interest in the field of study. The motif portraying the Stupa on the mountains suggests the dimensions of the field.

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NAMGYAL INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY
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BULLETIN OF TIBETOLOGY

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO SIKKIMESE HISTORY

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EDITORIAL

ANNA BALIKCI-DENJONGPA
Editor

This issue

It is our pleasure at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology to publish this special issue of the Bulletin of Tibetology with the theme: Contributions to Sikkimese History. Its four articles, which I hope will interest local as much as foreign readers, cover various periods and topics:

The first by Franz-Karl Ehrhard relates the late 15th and early 16th century visits and activities of Kaḥ thog pa lamas in the Himalayan valleys of Sikkim and Bhutan. The author suggests that the first representatives of the lHo mon Kaḥ thog pa had their residences in both Sikkim and Bhutan, and became influential in these regions at about the same time. It is indeed little known that bSod nams rgyal mtshan, a lama from Eastern Tibet, had opened the "western gate" (nub sgo) of the hidden valley of Sikkim (dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs) in the late 1400s. Better known are the openings of the hidden land, first by Rig 'dzin rgod ldem (1337-1408) and later by lHa btsun chen po nam mkha' 'jigs med (1597-1650). The latter is generally thought of as having permanently opened the hidden valley of Sikkim because his sub-school of the rNying ma pa gained a wide presence in the area and was instrumental in the establishment of Sikkim as a political entity.

The second article by Alex McKay is about the education of Sidkeon Tulku (1879-1914), the 10th Chogyal of Sikkim who ruled for less than a year before dying in mysterious circumstances. Despite his short rule, Sidkeon Tulku is still admired and remembered for thinking ahead of his time and introducing a number of reforms in an attempt to reduce the feudal conditions in the kingdom and improve the level of education. For example, already as crown prince, he concentrated his efforts on the abolition of salutation by prostration before kajis (landlords) and ordinary lamas, the abolition of fraternal polyandry, the education of women and the compulsory education of kajis' sons. His Oxford education undoubtedly influenced him in this direction, and I am certain Sikkimese will enjoy reading about their former king's tour around the world, British education and search for a suitable bride.

The third contribution by Saul Mullard relates the history of the Brag dkar pa family, better known locally as the Yangthang Kajis of West Sikkim, and discusses the nature of their ancestors' 18th century alliances with the Sikkimese Chogyals. Having been deputed from Tibet, Ka rma dar rgyas brag dkar pa had assisted the Sikkimese during the first Bhutanese war of the early 18th century by acting as general of the Sikkimese forces, pushing back the Bhutanese and maintaining the independence of Sikkim while the king had taken refuge in Tibet. He was then rewarded with a very large estate in today's district of West Sikkim. Later in the same century when Sikkim came under a renewal of military pressure from both Bhutan and Nepal, the Brag dkar pa family again demonstrated its support and loyalty to the Chogyal. Using original documents, the author explains how the earlier grant of land served as an emotional bond that helped secure the family's political alliance despite the fortunes or misfortunes of the Sikkimese state and its military campaigns.

The fourth article by Jackie Hiltz brings us to the 20th century when "the last Chogyal, or king of Sikkim, Palden Thondup Namgyal (1923-1981), and others led domestic efforts to create and shape a national identity for the kingdom, namely, an identity embraced by the multi-ethnic people of Sikkim and accepted as the foundation for a collective interest". The author describes the various methods used in this effort and the obstacles that were encountered at the time. Such an effort may today seem a utopian endeavour considering that Sikkim's ethnic communities have not been so much united in recent times. However, the following comments written by the British botanist Joseph Hooker in 1855 suggest that the Chogyal's effort were not baseless and perhaps rooted in the kingdom's recent multi-ethnic memory on which he hoped to build a national identity: "That six or seven different tribes, without any feudal system or coercive head, with different languages and customs, should dwell in close proximity and in peace and unity, within the confined territory of Sikkim, even for a limited period, is an anomaly... the fact remains no less remarkable, that at the period our occupying Dorjiling, friendship and unanimity reigned amongst all the tribes; from the Tibetan at 14,000 feet, to the Mechi of the plains..." (Himalayan Journals, 1855 [1987], pp.131-132).

The Bulletin

This is the third issue of the Bulletin of Tibetology since it was re-launched in 2002, and the second focusing more or less exclusively on Sikkim. The contents of future issues will now be broadened to include the Eastern Himalayas and other subjects of Tibetan Studies. We hope that these two special issues on Sikkim will have sparked some interest in Sikkimese Studies. These were sent out free of charge to a number of people and institutions in order to re-introduce the Bulletin and encourage subscriptions. We would like to thank all those who responded for their much appreciated subscriptions and encourage others, especially university libraries, to do so (please see included subscription form). Past issues (1964-2003) may also be ordered. Their contents can now be found on the Institute's web-site under publications (www.tibetology.com).

In the last issue, vol. 39 (1), we published an article by Martin J Boord entitled *A Pilgrim's guide to the Hidden Land of Sikkim proclaimed as a treasure by Rig 'dzin rgod kyi ldem 'phru can*. The following publication should have been listed in the bibliography since the same text, along with a translation and an introduction, can be found on pp. 202-224: Katia Buffetrille, *Pèlerins, lamas et visionnaires: sources orales et écrites sur les pèlerinages tibétains*, Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, Wien 2000. We apologise for the error and will be publishing in the upcoming issue, vol. 40 (1), a follow up by Katia Buffetrille entitled: *Pilgrimage and incest: the case of mChod rten nyi ma*.

For those intending to submit an article for publication, please use the Wylie method in transliterating Tibetan words. The Bulletin's style in rendering the Wylie method is as follow: 1. Names of people and places: first radical letter in capitals, no italics. 2. Titles of texts and teachings: first radical letter in capitals, in italics. 3. Text translations: italics with no capitals. 4. All other words: no italics, no capitals.

News and research

The Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (NIT) would like to encourage and assist Ph.D. level students and senior scholars in carrying out field research in Sikkim. Sikkimese Studies are indeed in their infancy and

we would particularly welcome research in Lepcha ethnography and ethno-botany. Other areas we would encourage are archaeology, ethnology, history, linguistics, art history, medical anthropology and Buddhist studies. For example, the Sikkimese dialect of Tibetan has never been studied, many periods of Sikkimese history have never been addressed and most cultures of Sikkim multi-ethnic society remain largely undocumented.

Saul Mullard, Ph.D. student from Oxford currently affiliated to the Institute, is carrying out research on the formation of the Sikkimese state while training NIT staff in basic research methodology and translation. We hope others will join him in helping us establish Sikkimese Studies and develop the Institute's activities.

Ongoing projects at the Institute include: 1) the monastery project, 2) the Sikkim video archive project, and 3) the historical photographs project. With the first, NIT staff are currently documenting the social history of Sikkim's 60-odd monasteries. In the second, filmmaker Dawa Lepcha is producing a video record of Lepcha social life and ritual over a period of many months under the supervision of visual anthropologist Asen Balikci. Over 60 hours worth of video has already been exposed in the Lepcha reserve of Dzongu in North Sikkim and a first film is currently being edited. In the third project, over 1500 historical photographs of Sikkim dating from the 1890s until the 1970s have been digitised from collections held in Sikkim and abroad. It is hoped that the audio-visual material assembled from both the video and photographic projects will soon be displayed in the Institute's museum.

The museum was recently renovated while maintaining its original style, and its collection catalogued. We would welcome art history students who wish to work on the Institute's collection which was assembled in the early 1960s thanks to the generosity of Tibetans and prominent Sikkimese families including the royalty who entrusted their valuable icons to the Institute for safe-keeping.

KAḤ THOG PA BSOD NAMS RGYAL MTSHAN (1466-1540)
AND HIS ACTIVITIES IN SIKKIM AND BHUTAN¹

FRANZ-KARL EHRHARD
University of Munich

[1]

The establishment of the monastery of Kaḥ thog in Eastern Tibet in the year 1159 marked an important step in the consolidation of the rNying ma pa school of Tibetan Buddhism. Its founder, Kaḥ dam pa bDe gshegs (1122-1192), occupies a prominent place in the transmission known as the “Spoken Teachings” (bka’ ma). This specific teaching tradition was further spread by a number of abbots, known collectively as the “Succession of Teachers [Consisting of] Thirteen [Persons]” (bla rabs bcu gsum). According to one way of counting, the list begins with sPyan snga bSod nams ’bum [pa] (b. 1222) and ends with mKhas grub Ye shes rgyal mtshan (1395-1458); the two immediate successors of Kaḥ dam pa bDe gshegs, gTsang ston rDo rje rgyal mtshan (1126-1216) and Byams pa ’bum [pa] (1179-1252), are not included in this particular list of successive regents of the glorious Kaḥ thog monastery.²

In the historiographical literature of the rNying ma pa school the period of the next series of abbots—called the “Succession of Attendants [Consisting of] Thirteen [Persons]” (drung rabs bcu gsum)—is characterized by an increasing influence of the tradition of the “Treasure Teachings” (gter ma), which led to a slight diminishing of the importance of the Spoken Teachings tradition. This event is linked to the journey of Drung Nam mkha’ seng ge, the first in this list of abbots, to the region of lHo brag, where he became the “master of

¹ A different version of this article will appear in the Bhutan panel volume (Pommaret F. and J. Ardussi eds), IATS Oxford 2003, Leiden: Brill.

² See Bya bral Rin po che Sangs rgyas rdo rje (b. 1913): *dPal rgyal rgyal ba kaḥ thog pa’i gdan rabs brgyud ’dzin dang bcas pa’i byung ba brjod pa rin po che’i phreng ba lta bu’i gtam*, n.p., n.d., fols. 31a/5-37a/4. The author states that this way of counting follows the *mTshan bsdoms gsol ’debs* of the teachers of Kaḥ thog composed by Kaḥ thog Si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho (1880-1925); *ibid.*, fol. 31b/1-2. The same authority is acknowledged by mKhan chen ’Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan (b. 1929): *gSang chen bstan pa’i chu ’go rgyal ba kaḥ thog pa’i lo rgyus mdor bsdus brjod pa ’chi med lha’i rnga sgra ngo mtshar rna ba’i dga’ ston*, Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1996, p. 54.3-5.

the teachings” (chos bdag) of the treasure-cycles of Rig ’dzin Ratna gling pa (1403-1478). This particular phase of new spiritual developments within the teaching lineages of Kaḥ thog in the 15th century was also the period when the exponent who would later create a subschool known as the lHo mon Kaḥ thog pa or Mon lugs Kaḥ thog pa received his training.³

A first assessment of the history of this subschool in Bhutan was provided by the late Michael Aris. He opened his sketch of the rNying ma pa in Bhutan with a treatment of the lHo mon Kaḥ thog pa, whom he called “[t]he first rNying ma pa to arrive in a formal sense”. According to the historical sources available to him, it was one of the abbots of the above-mentioned first group of regents of Kaḥ thog, a certain dBu ’od Ye shes ’bum [pa], who in the 13th century made his way to Bhutan on his way to Sikkim and founded in sPa gro sTag tshang the monastery of O rgyan rtse mo; the location of this old residence of the Kaḥ thog pa tradition was immediately above the main shrine of sTag tshang. It is further stated that this master had two disciples, namely bSod nams rgyal mtshan and the latter’s son rNam grol bzang po, who both settled at sTag tshang in the sPa gro valley.⁴

It was further noted by Aris that there exists a biography of bSod nams rgyal mtshan by a certain rNam grol bzang po, and also an autobiography, but he was obviously not in a position to consult these works. As we now have access to the biographical tradition of this teacher from Kaḥ thog closely connected with the religious history of Sikkim and Bhutan, I want to readdress the issue of the arrival of the lHo mon Kaḥ thog pa in the Himalayan valleys, and in particular at the famous Padmasambhava shrine near sPa gro. This will be done in two steps: clarifying the identity of Ye shes ’bum [pa] from the Kaḥ thog monastery, and giving an overview of the life of bSod nams rgyal mtshan, with special reference to his activities in Sikkim and Bhutan.

³ For the change in doctrinal emphasis from the Spoken Teachings to Treasure Teachings within the teaching lineages of Kaḥ thog in the 15th century see Ehrhard (1990: 88, note 20). For the counting of Nam mkha’ seng ge as the second drug and the difficulties of dating him see Eimer (2002: 331).

⁴ See Aris (1979: 153-154). There are two different sets of dates for dBu ’od Ye shes ’bum [pa], the third member of the bla rabs bcu gsum according to the enumeration advocated by Kaḥ thog Si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho. As documented by Eimer (2002:327-328 & 330), these dates are either 1254-1327 or 1242-1315. For the lHo mon Kaḥ thog pa in Bhutan compare also Aris (1994:23): “The Kathogpa school of eastern Tibet operated from within the Nyingmapa and established an early branch in Bhutan”.

[2]

If one consults the biographical account of dBu 'od Ye shes 'bum [pa] in modern works dealing with the monastery of Kaḥ thog and its different successions of abbots, one learns that this master had a great number of disciples from dBus and gTsang in Central Tibet, but there is no record of travels to either Sikkim or Bhutan. What is remembered about this particular regent is his rapport with the Sa skya pa scion 'Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan (1235-1280), who is said to have visited the rNying ma pa monastery in Khams on his way back from the Yüan court and to have received on that occasion the *sGyu 'phrul zhi khro* initiation from dBu 'od Ye shes 'bum [pa].⁵

A journey to Central Tibet and to the “Rice Country” ('Bras mo ljongs)—the name of modern-day Sikkim as known to the the followers of Padmasambhava—is recorded in the case of still another master from Kaḥ thog bearing the name Ye shes 'bum pa. This person is known as the “teacher from bZhag” (bZhag bla), a region in the Nyag rong province of Khams, and his name turns up in the list of the “Succession of Scholars” (mkhan rabs) of Kaḥ thog. One of the modern histories of the monastery provides the following account:

He who is called Ye shes 'bum pa, the teacher from bZhag [in] Nyag rong, a disciple of Jñānaketu, the one who is [both] learned and realized—this master of an ocean of the qualities of being learned, venerable [and] realized, in order to revive the stream of the doctrine in the regions of dBus [and] gTsang, and in order to search for the sacred site of the hidden valley “Rice Country”, proceeded to the regions of dBus [and] gTsang. In the end, after accruing marvellous benefit for the

⁵ For biographical data on dBu 'od Ye shes 'bum [pa] see Bya bral Rin po che (as in note 1, fol. 32a/1-b/3), and 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan (as in note 1, pp. 42.20-44.12). Compare: *mKha spyod 'bras mo ljongs kyi gtsug nor sprul pa'i rnal 'byor mched bzhi brgyud 'dzin dang bcas pa'i byung ba brjod pa blo gсар gzhon nu'i dga' ston* [= *A Saga of Sikkim's Supremely Revered Four Pioneer Nyingmapa Reincarnates and their Torchbearers*], Gangtok: Khenpo L. Tsering, 2002, pp. 20.10-22.16, for an evaluation of the different historical sources concerning the person of dBu 'od Ye shes 'bum [pa], and the conclusion that this regent of Kaḥ thog could not have reached Sikkim. It is also noted that the misidentification of dBu 'od Ye shes 'bum [pa] and bZhag bla Ye shes 'bum pa is responsible for the view that one of the early abbots of Kaḥ thog was already travelling to the south; see *ibid.*, p. 22.1-4.

doctrine and the beings, he passed away at the place of his spiritual practice in gTsang.⁶

The person referred to by the Sanskritized name “Jñānaketu” is the previously mentioned [mKhas grub] Ye shes rgyal mtshan, the last member of the bla rabs bcu gsum of Kaḥ thog. Both master and disciple thus belong to that phase in the history of Kaḥ thog when the influence of the Treasure Teachings was increasing, the cultural practice of the search for hidden valleys in the Himalayan border regions by rNying ma pa masters from Eastern Tibet being least partly attributable to the change in the doctrinal emphasis within the teaching tradition. At the same time, the transmission of the Spoken Teachings was restructured and new commentaries were written. This becomes especially clear from a transmission represented by mKhas grub Ye shes rgyal mtshan and bZhag bla Ye shes ’bum pa. In the historiographical literature of the rNying ma pa school, this transmission is noted for having promulgated the *sGyu ’phrul drva ba* and the *mDo dgongs pa ’dus pa*—the main tantras of respectively Mahāyoga and Anuyoga—as a unified system, and it was this particular tradition which was continued by lHo mon Kaḥ thog pa bSod nams rgyal mtshan and his disciple rNam grol bzang po.⁷

Having identified bZhag bla Ye shes ’bum pa instead of dBu ’od Ye shes ’bum [pa] as the first scholar of Kaḥ thog, who directed his

⁶ See Bya bral Rin po che (as in note 1), fol. 44a/1-4 (... *mkhas grub jñānaketu’i slob ma nyag rong bzhag bla ye shes ’bum pa zhes mkhas btsun grub pa’i yon tan rgya mtsho’i mnga’ bdag de nyid dbus gtsang phyogs su bstan rgyun gso ba dang / sbas yul ’bras mo ljongs kyi gnas ’tshol phyir dbus gtsang phyogs su phebs te bstan ’gro’i don rmad du byung ba mdzad nas mthar gtsang gi sgrub gnas su sku gshegs*). The characterization of bZhag bla Ye shes ’bum pa by ’Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan (as in note 1, p. 73.13-20) contains nearly the same wording, but it leaves out the search for the “hidden valley” (sbas yul), while adding more information on the localities in gTsang: “At the end of his life he revived the doctrine in [places] like Zur ’Ug pa lung and gSang sngags gling” (*sku tshe’i mthar zur ’ug pa lung dang gsang sngags gling sogs kyi bstan pa nyams so gnang*).

⁷ The lineage of this transmission starts with Kaḥ dam pa bDe gshegs, gTsang ston rDo rje rgyal mtshan and Byams pa ’bum [pa], but includes only the second and the thirteenth members of the bla rabs bcu gsum, namely sPyan snga Nam mkha’ rdo rje (b. 1223) and mKhas grub Ye shes rgyal mtshan; see Dudjom Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje (1991:699). Among the new commentaries of the Spoken Teaching tradition during that period, mention must be made of Ye shes rgyal mtshan’s exposition of the *Theg pa spyi bcings* of Kaḥ dam pa bDe gshegs; see *Theg pa spyi bcings rtsa ’grel*, Chengdu: Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1997, pp. 34-417. For the writings of Kaḥ dam pa bDe gshegs and the commentary of Ye shes rgyal mtshan, see Dalton (2002: 109-129).

steps to the Himalayan border regions, we are able to date the arrival of the lHo mon Kaḥ thog pa to Sikkim and Bhutan to the end of the 15th century. The initial spread of this subschool can now be described on the basis of the biographical tradition of Kaḥ thog pa bSod nams rgyal mtshan.

[3]

The autobiography bears the title “Rosary of Stainless Wish-fulfilling Jewels” (*Dri med yid bzhin nor bu'i phreng ba*) and was completed by bSod nams rgyal mtshan in sPa gro sTag tshang O rgyan rtse mo in the year 1539. Added to it is a work by his disciple rNam grol [Ye shes] bzang po which covers the final events of his teacher's life; this text must have been composed in the year 1541, since it mentions an “ox year” (glang lo) for the consecration of the reliquary shrine of bSod nams rgyal mtshan. The place of composition of the latter work is given as “the upper part of dGe rgyas 'Jag ma lung, below the great glacier mDzod lnga stag rtse, the western gate of the glorious Rice Country”.⁸ This seems to suggest that the first representatives of the lHo mon Kaḥ thog pa had their residences in both Sikkim and Bhutan, and became influential in these regions at about the same time.

In the following I will make use only of the autobiography, which is divided into three chapters, dealing respectively with prophecies concerning the person of bSod nams rgyal mtshan, with the teachers he relied upon during his spiritual training, and with the salvational means he had recourse to both for himself and for others. The second and third chapters are subdivided into five and eleven subsections respectively.

The initial part of the first chapter quotes from the *dGongs 'dus lung bstan bka' rgya ma*, that is, from “the cycle of the sealed pronouncements of prophecies for the future” (*ma 'ongs lung bstan bka' rgya ma'i skor*) of the *Bla ma dgongs pa 'dus pa*, a treasure-cycle of Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas gling pa (1340-1396). The works of this

⁸ See the dbu med text in *Shar kaḥ thog pa bsod nams rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i rnam par thar pa*, Gangtok & Delhi: Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentsey Labrang, 1979, p. 40.2-3 (*dpal 'bras mo bshongs (=gshongs) kyi nub sgo gangs chen mdzod lnga stag rtse'i zhol / dge rgyas 'jag ma lung gi phu*). The name “Great Glacier mDzod lnga stag rtse” for the Kangchenjunga range is already attested in the writings of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 'phru can (1337-1406), one of the earliest and most prolific writers of literature concerning hidden valleys; see his *sBas yul 'bras mo ljongs kyi gnas yig bsod pa* in *Rare Texts of the dPal spungs Tradition*, Gangtok: Sherab Gyaltzen, 1981, p. 374.5. For the different gates leading to Sikkim as a hidden sanctuary see note 10.

treasure-discoverer, along with ones of mNga' bdag Nyang ral [Nyi ma'i 'od zer] (1124-1192), Guru Chos [kyi] dbang [phyug] (1212-1270) and especially Rig 'dzin Ratna gling pa, are listed at the beginning of the second chapter as those religious traditions which dominated the studies of bSod nams rgyal mtshan up to the age of seventeen years. The names of his teachers during that period include Kun dga' 'bum [pa], Brag mgo rDo rje dpal, dGe 'dun blo gros and a certain La rgyab Shes rab dpal who transmitted the teachings of Klong chen Rab 'byams pa (1308-1364) to the young student. But the first and most important teacher was his own uncle, whom he accompanied up to lHa sa when the latter embarked on a journey to the regions of dBus and gTsang. This uncle is called in the autobiography mKhas grub Ye shes 'bum [pa], and he is none other than bZhag bla Ye shes 'bum pa from Nyag rong province in Khams.⁹

For the next three years bSod nams rgyal mtshan stayed in the "land of the gorges" (rong yul) where he was advised by two further teachers how to follow the life of a yogin and practise austerities. It was only after this experience, at the age of twenty years, that he entered the monastery of Kaḥ thog and took up his studies with the Great Ācārya Nam mkha' dpal. This teacher imparted to him the classic works of the Spoken Teachings tradition and its exegetical literature, such as the *Theg pa spyi bcings* of Kaḥ dam pa bDe gshegs; it is noted in the autobiography that this exposition was in the tradition of mKhas grub Ye shes rgyal mtshan. In addition, Nam mkha' dpal instructed his disciple in the different Indian and Tibetan commentaries on the *sGyu 'phrul drva ba*, the authority of the ācārya being based on the fact that he had penned an important commentary on this tantra. This course of study having been mastered over a period of seven years, there followed further studies under a number of teachers, all associated with Kaḥ thog monastery; among these we find the First Drung Nam mkha' seng ge and the Third Drung rGyal mtshan rdo rje.¹⁰

⁹ See the dbu med text of the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 45.6-57.3, for the studies up to the age of seventeen years. Only after his return from lHa sa did bSod nams rgyal mtshan attend upon other teachers than his uncle. His own birthplace is given as the "land of gZhag (sic) of Nyag rong [in] Khams" (... mdo khams nyag rong gzhang gi yul); see *ibid.*, p. 47.3-4. This description has already been noted as an early reference to the "toponym" (sa ming) "Nyag rong"; see Tsering (1993:103).

¹⁰ For the seven year study period with the Great Ācārya Nam mkha' dpal, see the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 60.2-65.5. The list of further teachers begins with the First Drung Nam mkha' seng ge and the Third Drung rGyal mtshan rdo rje; see *ibid.*, pp. 65.5-72.2. A short biographical sketch of Nam mkha' dpal can be found in the Kaḥ thog history written by 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan (as in note 1), p. 72.4-

[4]

At the age of twenty-seven years, during a visit to the monastery of bZthag yul dGon gсар in his home region, bSod nams rgyal mtshan saw in a dream his uncle bZthag bla Ye shes 'bum pa who urged him to come to Central Tibet and, more especially, to join him in opening dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs, that is, Sikkim. He left soon afterwards for dBus and gTsang, the autobiography giving as the date for this departure the tenth Tibetan month of the year 1493.

Without going into the details of the journey, the autobiography relates next the meeting with the uncle at his residence, called Theg chen chos sdings, at the “northern gate” (byang sgo) of the hidden valley known as Rice Land. There follows an interesting account of the difficult process of finding the proper entry point into the sanctuary, with no success being met at the “eastern gate” (shar sgo) and the “southern gate” (lho sgo). It is also stated that bSod nams rgyal mtshan took up this search in place of his uncle bZthag bla Ye shes 'bum pa, who had supplied him with the necessary guidebooks. The mission finally went to the “western gate” (nub sgo) and there came upon a site called dGe rgyas 'Jag ma lung; having passed through the “inner gate” (nang sgo), which bears the name g.Ya' ma sTag ri, the small group under the leadership of bSod nams rgyal mtshan arrived in the inner region of the sanctuary, said to be like a realm of the gods.¹¹

20. The title of the commentary of the *sGyu 'phrul drva ba* is given there as *gSang snying ṭikka dngul dkar me long* and is considered to be in the same class with the commentaries of Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po (b. 1040), Klong chen Rab 'byams pa and g.Yung ston rDo rje dpal (1285-1364). A biographical note on Nam mkha' seng ge, pointing out his role as a disciple of Rig 'dzin Ratna gling pa, is contained *ibid.*, pp. 66.10-67.13. Bya bral Rin po che's work (as in note 1), fol. 42a/1, remarks that the First Drung came from the same family as the first member of the bla rabs bcu gsum.

¹¹ This subsection of the second main chapter has the title “Account of the Opening of the Gate to the Hidden Valley, [Which Is] a Sacred Site” (*sbas yul gnas sgo phyed pa'i rnam thar*); see the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 72.2-82.5. The conception of “gates to the sacred site” (gnas sgo) in the four cardinal directions leading to the centre of a hidden land conceived as a maṇḍala is known from further cases; see, for example, the “four large gates” (sgo chen po bzhi) topographically located around the valley of Glang 'phrang—present-day Langtang—in Ehrhard (1997a: 342-344). An elaborate description of the four entry points to the hidden valley of Sikkim can be found in *sBas yul 'bras mo ljongs kyi gnas yig phan yon dang bcas pa ngo mtshar gter mdzod* (block print), fols. 19a/6-28b/2 & 42b/5-44b/4. This work is the scriptural basis for the observations by Brauen-Dolma (1985: 248-249) that the gates should be approached depending on the time of the year (in autumn

The remaining two sections of the chapter, dealing with the teachers of bSod nam rgyal mtshan, describe activities after the death of bZhag bla Ye shes 'bum pa, beginning with the funeral ceremonies on his behalf. The passing away of his first and most important teacher postponed for the time being a fuller engagement in the Himalayan valleys, and he discarded the idea of settling permanently in the inner part of the hidden valley just opened by him.

Travelling instead to lHa sa and to bSam yas in order to make offerings for bZhag bla Ye shes 'bum pa, bSod nam rgyal mtshan came across the Seventh Karmapa Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454-1506) in the Yar klungs valley, and while still in the valley, at the site of Chu mig dGon gсар, he received teachings from a certain Grags pa 'od zer. As this master was a member of the family of Rig 'dzin Ratna gling pa, bSod nam rgyal mtshan was able to receive those cycles of the treasure-discoverer's teachings which he had not obtained before. The next two teachers mentioned in the autobiography also imparted teaching traditions of the rNying ma pa school to him. In gTsang dMus ston chen po Kun bzang dpal gave the "reading authorization" (lung) of the "Collected Tantras of the Old [School]" (*rNying ma rgyud 'bum*), a detailed list of the contents of the 35 volumes being contained in the autobiography; from the same teacher he also received the *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* cycle of mNga' bdag Nyang ral [Nyi ma'i 'od zer]. Finally, in lHa stod lHo, bSod nam rgyal mtshan received the treasure-cycles of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 'phru can from a teacher called Chos rje sTon chen Grags pa rgyal mtshan; this master also transmitted to him the treasure-cycles of Rig 'dzin Shes rab me 'bar (1267-1326), a

from the east, in winter from the south, in spring from the west, and in summer from the north). The text in question is a compilation of different prophecies, consisting for the greater part of a long quotation from the ones of Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas gling pa; see the relevant section in *Bla ma dgongs pa 'dus pa las / ma 'ongs lung bstan bka' rgya ma'i skor*, Gangtok & Delhi: Sherab Gyaltzen, n.d., pp. 404.2-448.3 [= *sBas yul 'bras mo ljongs kyi gnas yig phan yon dang bcas pa ngo mtshar gter mdzod*, fols. 3a/5-56 b/3]. It should be noted that Rig 'dzin Sangs rgyas gling pa pays no attention to the western gate. A description of the entry through this gate can be found in the writings of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 'phru can; see his *gNas 'bras mo 'dzongs (=gshongs) gi lam yig* (manuscript), Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project, reel-no. L 278/, fols. 3b ff.; this text also mentions an inner gate with the name g.Ya ma sTag rtse (sic). For the observation that the text *sPyi'i them byang* of Rig 'dzin rGod ldem 'phru can—a work dealing with hidden valleys in general—contains numerous references to dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs, compare Childs (1999: 131, note 13).

treasure-discoverer who had been active in the sPa gro valley in Bhutan.¹²

[5]

After a three-year period from 1502 to 1505, devoted exclusively to the spiritual practice of these different teaching traditions at a site known as [Theg chen] chos sdings Yang dben rDo thang—obviously located in the vicinity of the former residence of his uncle bZhang bla Ye shes 'bum pa—bSod nams rgyal mtshan pondered the idea of returning to his home region in Khams and to the monastery of Kaḥ thog. At that time repeated invitations arrived at his hermitage in northern Sikkim from sPa gro sTag tshang, having been sent by a person named Bla ma Ngang brgyud rGyal ba. He finally took up the invitation. The autobiography records a request made by the Bhutanese disciple when his guest arrived for the first time at the celebrated Padmasambhava shrine of sTag tshang:

The regions of dBus gtsang, mDo khams, [and] especially [the monastery of] Kaḥ thog—they are pure lands, [and] the Dharma will always spread [there]. [Here, in] our Land of the Mon, a barbarous border country, the Dharma has not been diffused: the beings who are foolish [and benighted] like animals—take care of them with [your] great affection! [And] especially at the pilgrimage site of the Great One from Oḍḍiyāna, at [this cave known as] 'Tiger Den, Where Lions' Thoughts Are Accomplished', erect to completion a place for spiritual practice [this] we request [you]!¹³

¹² For the last two subsections of the second chapter see the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 82.5-105.5. The list of the contents of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* collection in 35 volumes can be found *ibid.*, pp. 92.2-98.6; this is a kind of provisional list, an extended version of which is said to be contained in the "list of teachings received" (thob yig) of bSod nams rgyal mtshan (not yet available). The teacher dMus ston chen po Kun bzang dpal is also known under the name Gling chen Kun bzang dpal, derived from his residence in gTsang, "the monastery of Gling bu [in] Nyang stod" (nyang stod gling bu dgon pa). This is known from the autobiography of the treasure-discoverer 'Gro 'dul Las 'phro gling pa (1488-1553) who stayed for a period of one year with the master Kun bzang dpal; see *Rig 'dzin chen po gter bton las 'phro gling pa'i dus gsum gyi skye brgyud dang rnam par thar pa che long tsam zhig bkod pa me tog 'phreng mdzes*, Gangtok & Delhi: Gonpo Tseten, 1979, pp. 387.1-391.1.

¹³ See the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 114.6-115.2 (*dbus gtsang mdo khams khyad par bka'* (sic) *thog phyogs / dag pa'i zhing yin bstan pa nam yang dar / bdag*

The teacher from Kaḥ thog provides the detailed story of the circumstances of the establishment of this site, to which he later gave the name “Tiger Den, the Peak of Oḍḍiyāna” (sTag tshang o rgyan rtse mo). A translation and edition of this part of the autobiography, which closes the second subsection of chapter three and covers the years 1507 to 1508, will be given on a later occasion. There remain nine subsections, dealing with the spiritual achievements of bSod nams rgyal mtshan and his further travels and teaching activities. I select three of them in order to sketch a rough picture of this part of his life-story.

The first one bears the title “An Account of How [the People of] Mon in the South Became Established in the Dharma” (*lho mon chos la bkod pa'i rnam thar*). At the beginning one finds the interesting statement of bSod nams rgyal mtshan that he was a recipient of all the Spoken Teachings of the rNying ma pa school and, although not a treasure-discoverer himself, had also obtained most of the Treasure Teachings available in his time. It was the transmission of the collection of Tantras from both these teaching traditions which he gave to his disciples at the start of his effort to spread these lineages in Bhutan:

In the beginning, at [sPa gro] sTag tshang, the meeting ground of the Ḍākinīs, headed by dBang phyug rgyal mtshan, the sky-yogin, and by the teacher Ngang brgyud rGyal [ba] and so forth—for an assembly of about five hundred [persons] with the proper karma—I performed in their totality [the transmission of] the Collected Tantras of the Old [School]. On

cag mon yul mtha' khab chos mi dar / dud 'gro lta bu'i blun rmongs sems can la / brtse ba chen pos rjes su bzung ba (=gzung ba) dang / khyad par o rgyan chen po'i gnas chen ste / stag tshang seng ge bsam grub 'di nyid du / bsgrub (=sgrub) sde cig kyang rab tu 'dzugs par zhu). For the gDung family of Ngang and their genealogy, see Aris (1979: 138-139); a person named rGyal ba is listed in the accompanying table; see (*ibid.*: 136). At the beginning of the 16th century sTag tshang was the most important pilgrimage site associated with Padmasambhava in the sPa gro and Had valleys. See, for example, the biography of the 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud pa yogin Grags pa mtha' yas (1469-1531), who paid visits to these sites after the death of his teacher lHa btsun Kun dga' chos kyi rgya mtsho (1432-1505). He, too, referred to sTag tshang under the name of the Seng ge bsam grub cave; see *rNal 'byor gyi dbang phyug grags pa mtha' yas dpal bzang po'i rnam thar mgur 'bum ngo mtshar nor bu'i phreng ba*, Gangtok: Gonpo Tseten, 1977, pp. 190.4-194.2.

these auspicious occasions, there were downpours of flowers, and marvellous signs and countless blessings appeared.¹⁴

After these initial transmissions in the western part of the country, bSod nams rgyal mtshan accepted an invitation from a certain rGyal mtshan ye shes, affiliated to a monastery called Kun bzang gling. This is one of the monasteries founded by the great Klong chen Rab 'byams pa in Bhutan, and is located in the sKur stod valley. As the teacher from Kaḥ thog travelled afterwards through the region of sNan lung, where another of Klong chen Rab 'byams pa's foundations can be found, one may surmise that he visited on this journey the sites associated with the famous codifier of the rDzogs chen doctrine; and in fact, besides transmitting the cycles of the Spoken Teachings collectively called *sGyu 'phrul zhi khro phur gsum*, he also gave empowerments and instructions of the *sNying thig* cycles of Klong chen Rab 'byams pa.

Another invitation having arrived from the valley of Bum thang from a person named Tshe dbang rgyal po, bSod nams rgyal mtshan gave once again teachings including the *sGyu 'phrul zhi khro phur gsum*. On that occasion he encountered Rig 'dzin Padma gling pa, who had just established his temple of gTam zhing in Bum thang. Further travels seem to have been mostly undertaken in the western valleys of Thim phu and sPa gro. For example, he was active in Glang ma lung and in lCags zam Thog kha; these two places, located in Thim phu and sPa gro respectively, are known to have been residences of the gNas rnying pa, a school of Tibetan Buddhism which was firmly established in western Bhutan at the time.

But it was, of course, at O rgyan rtse mo that bSod nams rgyal mtshan chiefly propagated his teaching traditions, including the *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa*, the *Bla ma dgongs pa 'dus pa*, the "Southern Treasures" (lho gter) and the "Northern Treasures" (byang

¹⁴ See the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 132.6-133.3 (*thog mar stag tshang mkha' 'gro 'dus sa ru / nam mkha' rnal 'byor dbang phyug rgyal mtshan dang / bla ma ngang brgyud rgyal sogs gtso byas pa'i / las ldan lnga brgya tsam gcig 'tshogs pa la / rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum yongs su rdzogs par byas / dus bzang rnams su me tog char babs shing / ngo mtshar ltas dang byin rlabs dpag med byung*). This seems to be the first reference to the transmission of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* in Bhutan; surprisingly, it was a transmission from gTsang and not from Kaḥ thog monastery. In the following period the main source for the diffusion of this collection of Tantras was lHo brag lHa lung, the main seat of the teaching tradition of Rig 'dzin Padma gling pa (1450-1521). For the importance of the Third Pad gling gsung sprul Tshul khriims rdo rje (1598-1669) in this process, see Ehrhard (1997b:256, note 8).

ger). At the same place, for the spiritual practice at sPa gro sTag tshang, he gave a second time the transmission of the Tantras of the Old School, on this particular occasion for people both from Mon yul and from Tibet. Among the group of about one hundred disciples, a Tibetan lady of noble origin is mentioned who offered the teacher a 35-volume set of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*. The autobiography suggests that although there existed at that time diverse reading authorizations of this collection, the complete one as maintained by the master from Kaḥ thog was quite rare.¹⁵

[6]

The subsection titled “An Extensive Account of Teachings [and] Initiations [Which Are] of Benefit for the Disciples of the Regions of dBus [and] gTsang” (*dbus gtsang phyogs kyi gdul bya la / chos dbang 'gro don rgyas pa'i rnam thar*) describes first travels to Bar 'brog in La stod, to 'Bring mtshams, and to mGo yul. In the latter area bSod nams rgyal mtshan gave public discourses to a great number of people, headed by the “princess” (dpon sa) bDag mo'i drung. He also revisited eastern gTsang, where his teacher Chos rje Gling chen, that is, Kun bzang dpal from the monastery of Gling bu, had since passed away. On that occasion he gave the complete initiations and instructions of the *bKa' brgyad bde gshegs 'dus pa* cycle in sPos khang lHa steng in Nyang smad.

Concerning his travels in dBus, the autobiography states that they began in the year 1528—at the age of sixty-two—when he was invited by a teacher known as dKar chen Kun dga' grags pa to the bSam yas vihāra. There he was called upon to consecrate a colossal statue of the

¹⁵ The travels in the eastern and western valleys are related in the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 133.3-142.2. For the eight monasteries founded by Klong chen Rab 'byams pa in Bhutan, see Aris (1979:315, note 19); compare Ehrhard (1992:54-56) for that part of his family line descending from Bum thang Thar pa gling. For a description of the erection of gTam zhing based on the biography of Rig 'dzin Padma gling pa, see Aris (1986b:33-37); the consecration of the temple took place in the year 1505. The history of the gNas rnying pa in Bhutan and their residences in Glang ma lung and lCags zam Thog kha is also treated by Aris (1979:191-195 & 322, note 131). Concerning the second transmission of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* at O rgyan rtse mo, see the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 142.3-143.6. The name of the Tibetan lady is given as rGyang rtse dPon sa bDag mo drung and bDag mo'i drung; she was thus a member of the ruling house of present-day Gyantse in gTsang. For the reading authorization of the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum*, see *ibid.*, p. 143.1-2 (*ding sang gsang sngags rnying ma'i rgyud 'bum lung / skor le than thun yod pa mang 'dug kyang / yongs rdzogs bdag tsam min pa dkon pa 'dra*).

Precious Guru Padmasambhava. The project of erecting such a huge icon had been initiated for the “expulsion of armed forces” (dmag bzlog), a danger that was quite real at the time in Central Tibet. After the consecration from a throne in front of the bSam yas pillar, he imparted teachings and initiations, and among the disciples are mentioned lHo brag [rDo rje gdan] Chos rje lHa ro ba and [bSam yas] gDan sa [pa] Rab ’byams pa dGe ba’i blo gros, both representatives of the teaching lineage of the master dKar chen Kun dga’ grags pa.¹⁶

Having visited the different sacred sites in the surroundings of the bSam yas vihāra, including ’Ching phu (sic) and Brag dmar g.Ya ma lung, the teacher from Kaḥ thog proceeded on to lHa sa, where his local patron was a person called bKor gNyer dpon or bKor bdag rGyal po. After giving teachings in lHa sa sKyid shod, he returned via La stod to his residence in the sPa gro valley of Bhutan, and there stayed in retreat for a longer period. bSod nams rgyal mtshan’s last journey to gTsang took place in the year 1532, when he visited the court of the rGyang rtse rulers. In front of an assembly of seven hundred people he imparted teachings and initiations from the traditions of the Spoken Teachings and the Treasure Teachings, including the cycle *Zab chos zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol* of Rig ’dzin Karma gling pa (14th century).¹⁷

¹⁶ For the travels in gTsang and the events in bSam yas, see the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 144.1-156.1. dKar chen Kun dga’ grags pa is known to have been a lineage-holder of the treasure-cycles of Sangs rgyas gling pa and of Dri med Kun dga’ (b. 1347). For his position in the lineage of Dri med Kun dga’ and the epithet “whitely [dressed] one” (dkar po ba), see the historiographical work of sTag sgang mKhas mchog [Ngag dbang blo gros] alias Guru bKra shis (18th/19th cent.): *bsTan pa’i snying po gsang chen snga ’gyur nges don zab mo’i chos kyi ’byung ba gsal bar byed pa’i legs bshad mkhas pa dga’ byed ngo mtshar gtam gyi rol mtsho*, Hsining, 1990, pp. 466.9-467.3. In order to spread the teachings of Sangs rgyas gling pa, this master kept up four “residences” (gdan sa). They were known as Dvags po dGongs ’dus gling (in the east), lHo brag rDo rje gdan (in the south), gTsang gi zab bu gling [=zab phu lung] (in the west), and bSam yas Ri bo rtse (in the north); see Karma Mi ’gyur dBang gi rgyal po (17th cent.): *gTer bton brgya rtsa’i mtshan sdom gsol ’debs chos rgyal bkra shis stobs rgyal gyi mdzad pa’i ’grel pa lo rgyus gter bton chos ’byung*, Darjeeling: Taklung Tsetrul Rinpoche Pema Wangyal, 1978, pp. 126.4-127.3. According to this passage dKar chen Kun dga’ grags pa was famous for renovating shrines and temples, among them the cave known as Nyi zla [kha sbyor] phug in sPa gro sTag tshang. For the erection of the colossal statue of Padmasambhava in lHo brag by the treasure-discoverer mChog ldan mgon po (1497-1531), a disciple of dKar chen Kun dga’ grags pa, and the dangers of armed forces in Central Tibet during this particular period, see Ehrhard (2000:35-37).

¹⁷ The second part of the journey to dBus and the last visit to gTsang can be found in the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 156.1-162.5. The period between these

As a kind of overview of the disciples who continued his teaching tradition bSod nam rgyal mtshan lists about a dozen names in the subsection called “An Account of the Assembling of the Great [Spiritual] Sons Who Transmitted the Dharma” (*chos brgyud bu chen 'dus pa'i rnam thar*). The enumeration starts with dKar chen Kun dga' grags pa and includes both lHa ro Chos rje—now qualified as being a member of the family of Guru Chos [kyi] dbang [phyug]—and Rab 'byams pa dGe ba'i blo gros, namely the respective representatives of dKar chen Kun dga' grags pa's teaching lineage from lHo brag and bSam yas. Two of the disciples were at the same time bSod nam rgyal mtshan's own teachers: dMus ston chen po Kun bzang dpal from gTsang and Chos rje sTon chen Grags pa rgyal mtshan from La stod lHo. The noble Tibetan lady dPon sa'i bdag mo drung is now identified as an “emanation of [Ye shes] mTsho rgyal” (mtsho rgyal sprul pa), the Tibetan consort of Padmasambhava. The list also contains the name g.Yang lung [Chos rje] Kun dga' legs pa'i 'byung gnas; this person is always mentioned as being in the company of the female patron of bSod nam rgyal mtshan in the different episodes noted above.

One also finds in the list the name of Chos rje Grags pa rgyal mtshan, one of the sons of Rig 'dzin Padma gling pa; he was that offspring of the great treasure-discoverer from Bhutan who had inherited the temple of gTam zhing in the valley of Bum thang. Another disciple of the teacher of Kaḥ thog was Rig 'dzin bsTan gnyis gling pa (1480-1535), whose alternative name is given in the autobiography as the “treasure-discoverer [from] Chu bzang” (chu bzang gter ston).¹⁸ The list closes with the names of two brothers,

two travels was devoted to the composition of the main literary work known to exist from the pen of bSod nam rgyal mtshan. It bears the title *bKa' thams cad gsal bar ston pa byed pa / bstan pa thams cad kyi spyi 'grel / theg pa thams cad kyi shan 'byed / man ngag thams cad kyi dgongs don / sems kyi chos nyid mngon du rtogs pa'i me long / nyi 'od gsal ba*; see the Kaḥ thog histories of Bya bral Rin po che (as in note 1), fol. 44b/3-6, and of 'Jam dbyangs rgyal mtshan (as in note 1), pp. 74.17-75.2. The work was published, under the title *Theg pa thams cad kyi shan 'byed nyi 'od rab gsal*, in two parts (230 fols. & 181 fols.), Delhi: Kunzang Tobgyal 1979 (the year of composition is lcags pho stag = 1530). My thanks to Prof. Per K. Sorensen for providing a copy of this text. Like mKhas grub Ye shes rgyal mtshan's exposition of the *Theg pa spyi bcings*, this work should be classified among the new commentaries of the Spoken Teachings tradition; see note 6.

¹⁸ For the subsection dealing with the different disciples see the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 175.4-180.3. Rig 'dzin bsTan gnyis gling pa was affiliated to the 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud pa monastery of Chu bzang and had met Rig 'dzin Padma gling pa at the latter's temple gTam zhing in the years 1519 and 1520. He returned to Bhutan in the year 1532 and raised treasure-works in two caves at the sacred site of

simply referred to as the “ones from mNga’ ris” (mnga’ ris pa). This designation refers to mNga’ ris Paṅ chen Padma dbang rgyal (1487-1542) and to mNga’ ris Rig ’dzin Legs dan bdud ’joms rdo rje (b. 1512). If one consults their biographies from a later historical tradition, one finds references to meetings of these teachers from Western Tibet with both the founder of the lHo mon Kaḥ thog pa and with rNam grol bzang po, his immediate successor.¹⁹

[7]

The final advice offered by bSod nams rgyal mtshan before he passed away at O rgyan rtse mo called for his disciples to follow their spiritual

sPa gro sTag tshang. These places are called Nyi zla [kha sbyor] phug and Sen ge bsam grub phug; see his autobiography *Rigs* (sic) *’dzin bstan gnyis gling pa’i rnam thar las / rnal lam lung bstan gyi skor*, Delhi: Dawa Lama, 1982, pp. 94.2-95.1; at the latter cave Rig ’dzin bsTan gnyis gling pa rediscovered teachings originally found there—and then hidden again—by Gu ru Tshe brtan rgyal mtshan, an early treasure-discoverer active in Bhutan; see Ehrhard (1997a:341 & 350, note 12). After these findings, a meeting of the master from Chu bzang with Chos rje Kaḥ thog pa bSod nams rgyal mtshan is recorded in the text. Another disciple of Rig ’dzin Padma gling pa who had retrieved treasure-cycles from sPa gro sTag tshang was the previously mentioned ’Gro ’dul Las ’phro gling pa. He remained afterwards for one year in the company of bSod nams rgyal mtshan at O rgyan rtse mo, listening to his exposition of the lineages of the Spoken Teachings and Treasure Teachings; see the autobiography of ’Gro ’dul Las ’phro gling pa (as in note 10), pp. 384.3-387.1.

¹⁹ See the biography of mNga’ ris Paṅ chen Padma dbang rgyal written by rDo rje brag Rig ’dzin Padma ’phrin las (1640-1718): *’Dus pa mdo dbang gi bla ma brgyudpa’i rnam thar ngo mtshar dad pa’i phreng ba* (=Smanrtsis Shesrig Spendzod, 37), Leh: S.W. Tashigangpa, 1972, p. 323.2 (*kaḥ thog pa chos rje bsod nams rgyal mtshansogs bshes gnyen mang po dang chos skyes ’bul res mdzad*); this meeting with bSod nams rgyal mtshan occurred in 1529 during the latter’s sojourn at the bSam yas vihāra. mNga’ ris Rig ’dzin Legs dan bdud ’joms rdo rje was regarded as an incarnation of Rig ’dzin rGod ldem ’phru can and, like his predecessor, undertook to open d’al gyi ’bras mo ljongs. This happened after the death of his elder brother in the year 1542; for a meeting with rNam grol bzang po at the former residence of bZhang la Ye shes ’bum pa at [Theg chen] chos sdings, located at the northern gate of the hidden valley, see *ibid.*, p. 371.6 (*slar yang ’bras gshongs phyogs su phebs te spa gro stag tshang nas rin po che kaḥ thog pa rnam grol bzang po drang lung chos sdings su phebs dang mjal*). mNga’ ris Rig ’dzin also stayed for some time in sPa gro sTag tshang and obtained there an “introduction certificate” (kha byang) for a treasure-cycle which he later retrieved from the bSam yas vihāra. See rDo rje brag Rig ’dzin Padma ’phrin las: *’Khor ba dbyings sgrol gyi khrid yig shas don gsal ba lam bang snying po* (=Smanrtsis Shesrig Spendzod, 66), Leh: S.W. Tashigangpa, 1973, p. 475.1-2 (*spa gro stag tshang du bzhugs dus o rgyan chen pos zhal bstan cing kha byang yang rnyed pa la brten nas bsam yas nas zab gter spyang drangs shing dben gnas isam yas mchims phu legs par thugs snyans su bstan*).

practice at such sacred sites in Tibet as Zab phu lung and 'Ching phu (sic) in the vicinity of the bSam yas vihāra. But first and foremost they were urged to stay at the "great hidden valley" (sbaṅ yul chen po) called dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs and at sPa gro sTag tshang; and in the latter case at a site called Nyi zla dmar mo, which obviously refers to the previously mentioned Nyi zla [kha sbyor] phug. If one consults, in addition to the autobiography, the account by rNam groḷ [Ye shes] bzang po, it becomes clear that in 1539 the master from Kaḷ thog had a dream of the country known as Rice Land, and that this particular vision resulted in his handing over to his disciple a written scroll describing the entry through the western gate.²⁰

Although the literary sources are quite reticent about the activities of the following representatives of the lHo mon Kaḷ thog pa in Sikkim and Bhutan, it is known at least that in the middle of the 17th century the western gate was entered once more by a teacher from Eastern Tibet in order to gain access to dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs, and that this time the journey resulted in the permanent presence of this sub-school of the rNying ma pa in the hidden valley of Sikkim. Such a settlement process had already occurred in Bhutan at the beginning of the 16th century, and one may attribute this to the fact that the memory of Padmasambhva and the expectation that his prophecies would be fulfilled were very much alive at the sacred shrine in the sPa gro valley during that particular period.

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²⁰ For the section of the final advice dealing with the sacred sites see the autobiography (as in note 7), pp. 220.3-221.4. The dream of the year 1539 is to be found *ibid.*, pp. 15.3-16.5. Concerning the "Four Great Yogins" (rnal 'byor bzhi) or the "Four Great Yogins [Who Are] Brothers" (rnal 'byor mched bzhi) associated with the definitive opening of dPal gyi 'bras mo gshongs—including Phun tshog rnam rgyal (1604-1670), the first Buddhist ruler of Sikkim—see the work of Bya baḷ Rin po che (as in note 1), fols. 133b/4-135a/2. Additional information on Kaḷ thog pa Kun tu bzang po, who at that time entered through the western gate and founded in Sikkim a "site for a monastic community" (dge 'dun gyi sde), is contained in the work of Khenpo L. Tsering (as in note 5), pp. 231.17-232.16.

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‘THAT HE MAY TAKE DUE PRIDE IN THE EMPIRE
TO WHICH HE BELONGS’:

THE EDUCATION OF MAHARAJAH KUMAR
SIDKEON NAMGYAL TULKU OF SIKKIM

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In 1879, the first wife of the 9th Maharajah of Sikkim, Thutob Namgyal, gave birth to their second son, Sidkeon Namgyal, following the birth of a daughter in 1876 and their first son, Tsodag Namgyal, in 1878. The Maharani died in childbirth in 1880,¹ and the years that followed were difficult ones for the Maharajah, as the interests of Sikkim clashed with those of the British Indian empire. Following the conflict of 1888, a British Political Officer was appointed to oversee the administration of Sikkim. The officer selected, John Claude White (1853-1918), was a mean, petty and domineering individual who, during the following two decades in which he dominated the state of Sikkim, carried on a long vendetta against both the Maharajah and his son Tsodag Namgyal. John Claude White's successors in the Gangtok Residency included some of the outstanding frontier officers of the British empire, men such as Lieutenant-Colonel F.M. Bailey (1882-1967) and Lieutenant-Colonel Sir W.F. O'Connor (1870-1943), as well as forward-thinking and culturally sensitive diplomats such as Sir Charles Bell (1870-1945) and Sir Basil Gould (1883-1956).

White, however, who came from the Public Works Department rather than the usual military or ICS background required of Political Officers, was the worst type of colonial official, lacking the background, training, and character that produced his successors. Sikkim, however, was no place for an ambitious 'Political' in the late 1880s, and White seems to have been appointed because no Political Officer wanted the job. While in the normal scheme of things he would have been appointed to head the Tibet Mission of 1903-04, his failings were obvious to Lord Curzon, who chose the dynamic Political Officer Francis Younghusband to head that mission, with White an isolated and unpopular nominal deputy. Despite his failings, White lingered on in Gangtok until he reached retirement age in 1908, whereupon the Government of India was able to replace him with Charles Bell. White,

however, wrote a self-serving memoir, *Sikkim and Bhutan* (London 1909), and with the imperial government not anxious to highlight its officer's failings, he came to be favourably regarded by British history.²

In February 1899, the British Government of India recognised Sidkeon Namgyal as the heir to the throne of Sikkim,³ passing over Tsodag Namgyal, who had sided with his father in various disputes with White, and who remained in exile in Tibet while his father managed an uneasy reconciliation with the British. In so doing, White apparently hoped to make a clean break with the past, and to install as Sikkim Maharajah a more compliant ruler. The youth in whom the British placed their trust was actually a recognised Buddhist incarnation (*tulku*), who had been destined to a religious life, and his innocence of the political world was doubtless a key factor in the British preference. Here, they reasoned, was a young man they might shape in their own image.

The Maharajah Kumar had learned 'a smattering of Hindi and Tibetan' in 1893-95 from the 'Rajah Tendook at Bhutia Basti near Darjeeling',⁴ and as early as 1895, the British had sought to educate him in the English language. Sir Alfred Croft, a key figure in imperial education projects on the north-east frontier,⁵ recommended that he receive instruction from Sarat Chandra Das, the noted explorer of Tibet,⁶ and for nine months in 1895-96 he spent an hour a day with the Bengali *pandit*. For the next three years he was taught by various military surgeons in Gangtok on an *ad hoc* basis, often going months without a lesson. In 1899 he was then sent, 'at his own request, many times repeated, for about six or seven months to St Paul's school at Darjeeling as a private pupil of the Rector. ... [But he] was not sufficiently advanced to take part in the studies of the other boys. He was then withdrawn.' None of his teachers apparently proved of much value, for as the Kumar later wrote 'I regret to say that during these years, I made little progress in my English education.'⁷

An education in the language of the colonial power had, by this time, become almost an essential qualification for ruling one of the 'princely' or 'protected' states under the British empire. It signified the embrace of modernity, or at the very least enabled the local ruler to understand the culture of the imperial overlords. The establishment of an education system based on that of the British, and emphasising the use of the English language, had a long history in India, particularly in Bengal, and was regarded by the British as one of the great benefits of their rule. But it was also to produce the class that demanded the same

freedoms education taught and that were available to the British. However, at that time this was not a factor in Sikkim, where the British education system was entirely absent.

When the ruling chiefs of British India were invited to the Delhi Durbar of January 1st, 1903, the Maharajah of Sikkim did not attend, because, according to White, the court astrologers had said that if he did, he would fall ill. In fact, as A.J.K. Singh has described, White refused to let the Maharajah attend and insisted that the young Kumar should represent Sikkim on this first occasion when a Sikkimese leader was to attend a state function of the British empire.⁸

The Kumar's experience of British power was further developed when, having attended the Durbar, he was involved in the negotiations at Khambajong between the Governments of India and Tibet in the lead-up to the 1903-04 Younghusband mission. After Younghusband's forces had fought their way to Lhasa and forced the Tibetan government to allow British-Indian representatives to be stationed in Tibet, Younghusband's 'right-hand man', the Political Officer W.F. O'Connor, was posted at Gyantse as, in effect, British India's representative in Tibet. This produced a somewhat awkward situation, for O'Connor was nominally under the command of the Political Officer in Sikkim, John Claude White. But O'Connor detested White and his relationship with his nominal superior was a difficult one, as he enjoyed the full support of the Indian Foreign Secretary, Louis Dane, and had gained permission to communicate directly with his government without consulting White.

That O'Connor should be given such an unprecedented right was not only due to White's poor reputation with the Government of India. O'Connor, who was fluent in Tibetan, was a skilled intelligence agent. Having served in the Intelligence branch in Simla, mapping – and clandestinely exploring – routes into Tibet, he was appointed intelligence officer on the Younghusband mission and had built up a network of paid informants in Tibet who reported on Chinese and Russian activities there, as well as on those of the Tibetan government and its officials.⁹

With the Dalai Lama having fled Lhasa shortly before the arrival of Younghusband, O'Connor cultivated the friendship of the Panchen Lama. His ultimate aim was to install the Panchen as ruler, if not of Tibet, at least of a new state in southern Tibet centred on Shigatse.¹⁰ As part of that plan, O'Connor brought the Panchen Lama down to India in November 1905, and he was given a tour designed to impress him with the might of the Raj. The Kumar accompanied O'Connor and the

Panchen on this tour, during which they visited the sacred sites of Indian Buddhism, and were introduced to the then Viceroy, Lord Minto.¹¹

By this time the Kumar was growing restless. In August 1905 he had written to White pointing out that for the past five years

I have lived in Gangtok with nothing much to do except attend to my private affairs. I am now twenty-six years old, and it is time I did some real work, but before busying myself with the affairs of State, I am very anxious to complete my English education, so as to fit me for my work here, now and in the future, for my country's good... . I will have to manage the affairs of State...and introduce improvements in...the welfare of the people...especially of the Bhutias and Lepchas, the real people of the country, who are too poor and ignorant to improve their position without help and guidance from those in authority over them... . I do not feel prepared to undertake this trust. I need more knowledge, which can only be obtained by study in that country where Englishmen are trained to govern India, and by travel in Foreign [*sic*] lands which will open my mind and broaden my views. My earnest desire is that I may be allowed to study for a year in England... . After the completion of my studies, on my way back to Sikkim, I hope I may be allowed to travel through Europe, Japan, and China... . I do not desire to go as a Kumar or to travel as one, but as an ordinary student, taking only one servant, or without one, so that the expenses may be kept as low as possible.¹²

The origins of the plan that the Kumar put forward are uncertain. While the idea could have been the Kumar's alone, it was common practice for the Political Officers to advise the indigenous elites to take a particular course of action which they (the Political Officers) would represent to their own government as arising from the desire of the indigenous elites. They would naturally support the idea and the Government of India would then be faced with a suggestion from a local ruler that was supported by their representative, and were thus (finances permitting) likely to support it, not least because they could present it to the Home Government in Whitehall as something all parties agreed on. What seems likely is that one or all of Bell, White, and O'Connor suggested the idea to the Kumar, who was excited by the prospect.¹³

The Kumar soon followed up this original request with a more refined proposal; that he be accompanied by three young men who would assist with implementing reforms after their return; that a guardian/tutor be allocated to him by the Government of India; that he 'attend one of the big English schools, either Rugby or Eton, where I could mix with the boys in their games and outdoor life...[and] ...[d]uring the vacation...a walking tour in England and Wales might be taken.' In addition, the Kumar added a new proposal, that after leaving England he undertake a six month tour of the world (including America), with three months to be spent in Japan 'where the Buddhist religion could be studied.'¹⁴

In this proposal the Kumar also noted that 'It will be necessary to adopt the European style of dress so as not to be conspicuous.' This was an important point in the wider context. The adoption of Western dress was an important symbolic marker of an individual's acceptance of, and identification with, modernity.

In March 1906, White forwarded the Maharajah's suggestions to the imperial government, adding that

The Maharajah Kumar is now 26 years of age. His present surroundings in Sikkim, being narrow and limited and breathing an atmosphere of ignorance and superstition, are not calculated to improve him It would remove him for a time from the baneful influence and sordid intrigues of the palace, and would make him more independent, more confident of himself, more manly.¹⁵

White proposed that he take the Kumar to England and remain with him for one month, in addition to which he wanted three months special leave.

The Viceroy approved of the Kumar's voyage to England for educational purposes, but he was concerned over the social side of the visit, and emphasised that '[t]he party should not be introduced to society in London as the object of the tour is purely educational.'¹⁶ But as if in recognition that this was a vain hope, the issue of White accompanying the Kumar was recognised as a problem. Experience had shown that White was simply not equipped with the right background to fit into the intensely class-conscious world of British society. The India Office were informed that

White...a P.W.D. man ...was put in as he was good at making roads...he is quite a nice fellow but I ...doubt very much whether he were quite the right man to choose a tutor for the Kumar, and certainly he would never do to take the Kumar about in society. Sir Walter Lawrence will perhaps tell you how *gauche* he was over the Prince of Wales's visits to his charges at Calcutta.¹⁷

* * *

On the 8th of September 1906, the Maharajah Kumar and two Sikkimese companions sailed from Bombay on the P&O liner, the *S.S.Peninsular*.¹⁸ It seems to have eventually been decided that White would accompany him to England and then return, leaving the Kumar without a formal escort. The original idea that he attend an English school had been abandoned, presumably on the grounds that at the age of 26, the Kumar would not fit easily into school life. Instead he was to be sent to Pembroke College Oxford, where a Mr Bernard Blackiston was to be his tutor.

The Kumar soon settled down in Oxford, making friends and enjoying his new life. He took four hours a week of drawing lessons at Ruskin art school, in addition to 13 hours a week of English language and culture lessons from Blackiston. In addition he was enrolled in a course on elementary mechanics and physics in line with White's desire that he receive some technical education. But Blackiston had little regard for this technical education. 'I must' he wrote 'disassociate myself with any responsibility as to what the Rajah Kumar learns or does not learn in respect to electricity.'¹⁹

Nor did the Oxford graduate and soon-to-be Political Officer in Sikkim Charles Bell see much point in the Kumar's studying electricity when he lacked a scientific background and was still struggling to learn English. While on leave in the U.K., Bell visited the Kumar in Oxford and recommended that his practical education should focus on forestry and agriculture, political economy, especially tax, and that he should take the course of 18 lectures in Indian law that was intended for Indian Civil Service probationers.

Although he did not meet Blackiston, Bell reported to the India Office that the role of the Kumar's tutor was crucial. 'He is no doubt the most important of all. While teaching the Kumar he should endeavour to strengthen the latter's pro-British ideas.' The Kumar's education, Bell stated, should be centred on English with readings in

history, 'that he may take due pride in the empire to which he belongs.'²⁰

Bell also noted that while the Kumar was 'lonely at times', 'he was 'anxious to use his time at Oxford to the utmost [*sic*] for educational purposes.' The Kumar, who was lodging in Oxford with a Mrs Skinner, lived quite frugally although he did some entertaining. His accounts for November 1907 show that he spent 4 pounds, 12 shillings and 6 pence, the expenses including one box of cigarettes and several cakes along with medical expenditure.²¹ Suitable outings were arranged for him, for example, he was given permission to visit the Naval dockyards and was shown over a British destroyer.²² He also visited Switzerland in September 1907 in the company of his tutor Blackiston. There are no details of the visit, and Blackiston resigned his position the day after they returned without offering any written explanation.²³

The Kumar then moved into rooms at Pembroke College, but apparently did little to further his education during his remaining stay there. His thoughts were already turning to his return journey, which, he hoped, would include Japan and a return to Sikkim via eastern Tibet. White had already noted that 'the great object will be keeping him engaged in congenial occupation, so that he will remain contented and happy and not become discontented with his lot and anxious to get away as so many Indian princes do on their return to India.'²⁴ So he suggested creating a position for the Kumar as chief Dewan, taking on some of White's work, and White, who had no desire to retire, offered to stay on in Sikkim. White's offer was ignored, but his thoughts on the Kumar's future were significant, for there were those who felt that '[t]he undesirability of sending young Indian Princes to England to be educated has been proved in every instance in which the experiment has been tried, and in my opinion the practice should be strongly discouraged in the future.'²⁵

The Kumar had already confided in White on another aspect of the future. In November 1906 he wrote to White that

I am now approaching an age when it would be desirable for me to think of finding a wife. I think you know that there is no one suitable in Sikkim at present, and I am not inclined to send to Tibet for any Tibetan lady as I could not go myself and I would not like the choice to be left to someone else. Do you think the Government of India would approve if I were to try and find a Japanese lady while I am travelling in that country: I understand they are more intelligent and better educated than

our Sikkim girls, and one great advantage is that we should both be of the same religion...I think we should spend a few months in Japan, in order that we may become acquainted with suitable and desirable families.²⁶

In India, White supported the Kumar's plan,²⁷ and the Viceroy was sympathetic, but after some discussion, and consulting the British Ambassador in Tokyo, it was concluded that a Japanese wife would not be a suitable match.²⁸ The reasons were noted as follows;

1. A possible influx of Japanese into Tibet; 2. The possibility, not to say probability, of the marriage turning out unhappily owing to the complete change of life and environment involved for the lady; 3. In the event of disagreements arising between husband and wife the Japanese Government might possibly espouse the cause of the lady; 4. The issue of mixed marriages is seldom satisfactory.²⁹

The Kumar anxiously awaited the Government of India's decision, but was finally informed that

I am afraid that it would not be feasible for you to undertake a journey through Tibet at present, and the idea must be abandoned. I am sorry also to have to inform you that the Government of India are unable to approve your projected visit to Japan as they consider it would be best for you not to be away from Sikkim too long at one time, and that you should take some share in the work of the State, at an early date.³⁰

The Kumar was obviously disappointed by the Government of India's decision, and appealed to the Secretary of State for India, who declined to alter the decision. There was, however, a solution to one of the problems, which White pointed out to the Kumar. The Government had declined to allow the Kumar to visit Japan to look for a wife, but perhaps they might look more favourably on an application to visit Japan on pilgrimage!

So the Kumar duly applied to visit Japan for religious reasons, while also noting that 'watching its progress and advance in civilization...[would be]...the very greatest help and value to me when considering the welfare of my own country.'³¹ The Government were conscious of the need not to alienate the Kumar, and it was noted that

‘our inability to acquiesce in the marriage he had set his heart on has caused much soreness, which it would be as well to remove, if possible.’ Thus the Kumar’s hopes of seeing something of the world before he returned to Sikkim were to be fulfilled. It was agreed that he should take a tour, with the proviso that he did so under escort, with all costs to be met from Sikkim state revenues.³²

While White and Bell were both considered as escorts, with the Kumar specifically asking for White, the long-serving Political Officer was soon to go on leave prior to retirement and Bell was earmarked to replace him. The Government of India were glad to be getting rid of White, and so the choice fell on White’s old insubordinate subordinate, the then Captain W.F. ‘Frank’ O’Connor, who as a son of landed Protestant Irish aristocracy, was a man far more at home in ‘high society’ than was White.

O’Connor drew up an itinerary which was approved by the Viceroy, although he preferred that the Kumar should spend more time in Canada than in America on the dubious grounds that the young man ‘would learn more’ in the British dominion. O’Connor’s proposal was a tour arranged by Thomas Cook, at a total cost of £2,000.³³ It involved a sea journey on the *S.S. Mauritania* to New York, then by land to Montreal, Ottawa and Chicago, and thence on via the Grand Canyon to San Francisco. From there they were to sail on the *S.S. Siberia* to Honolulu and on to Yokohama, then Tokyo. After a month in Japan, they were to sail to Seoul, then Mukden (Manchuria), and by land through Tientsin, Peking, Hankow, Shanghai and Hong Kong, from where they would travel by sea via Singapore to Calcutta. The various British embassies along the way were to be informed of the Kumar’s impending arrival, and the Government of India provided him with a letter of introduction.³⁴

So it was that the Maharajah Kumar and his British escort left Liverpool station at noon on the 11th of July 1908 and boarded the *S.S. Mauritania*, which sailed at 6 that evening. After an ‘uneventful voyage’ they arrived in New York on the morning of the 17th, where the British Vice-Consul met them and drove them to the Waldorf Hotel. They spent three days in New York, ‘which was very hot and disagreeable’, with visits to the stock exchange and the US sub-treasury before leaving for Montreal. After a day’s rest there, they took a boat to view Niagara Falls.³⁵

We know nothing of the Kumar’s impressions of North America. O’Connor submitted a sparse diary of events coloured only by the observation that after viewing Niagara Falls, they went on to Chicago,

where they ‘attended a political meeting of the new “Independence Party” in the evening and heard some fine American rhetoric.’ O’Connor, however, was following a plan. He reported that

while attaching myself but little importance to the mere moving from place to place, or the mere gazing at some show spot, such as the falls of Niagara or a Japanese Temple, I have endeavoured to indicate to the Maharaja Kumar the educative value to be derived from such things by associating them with the physical or social phenomena of which they are products....whilst duly admiring such objects of natural or artificial beauty as we have encountered, my aim has been especially to inculcate into his mind the broader lessons to be learnt from a study of national institutions, characteristics, and development.³⁶

On the 28th of July they arrived at the Grand Canyon, where they stayed three days, making an expedition to the bottom of the canyon, before leaving for San Francisco. The charms of that city must have pleased them, for they remained for six days, but their activities there are not recorded.

On the 11th of August, they boarded the *S.S. Siberia* and sailed for Yokohama, with a stop-over to view Hawaii by motor-car. Arriving in Yokohama on the 28th, they stayed there until the 4th of September before taking a train to Nikko for a three day walking tour from Chuzenji to Ikao, whereupon they travelled to Tokyo. Only here did O’Connor begin to describe events in more detail. The journey through North America had apparently been something of a normal holiday tour for both men, with the Kumar doubtless an exotic guest for his American hosts. But once he arrived back in Asia, there were significant religious and political implications to the Kumar’s presence.

* * *

On the 17th of September 1908, the Kumar had an audience with the Mikado, and four days later he ‘addressed a large meeting of Japanese Buddhists on the subject of the Buddhist Shrine Restoration Society, and met with cordial sympathy from them all.’ In Kyoto, where he stayed from the 22nd of September until the 11th of October, he visited girls’ and boys’ schools and universities ‘and made such study as we could of the Japanese system of education.’

But as O'Connor noted, they

also saw a good deal of my friend Count Otani, the head of the Nishi Honguanji sect of Japanese Buddhism and of his friends and relations, by whom we were entertained at dinners, picnics, etc. We thus had an opportunity of seeing something of Japanese social life under pleasant auspices. Count Otani himself is a very remarkable man, highly cultured and well-read, who has travelled in most parts of the world.

There was more to Otani than that, however. As Scott Berry has discussed, before he fell from Royal Favour over financial issues, the Count was an ambitious aristocrat who was responsible for the dispatch of a number of Japanese agents to Tibet. He and O'Connor were old acquaintances, and at a time when Japanese and British interests coincided, it seems likely that they shared intelligence on Central Asia.³⁷

After leaving Kyoto, O'Connor and the Kumar travelled on via Osaka to Kobe, where they stayed for four days, and thence sailed on the Inland sea to Miyajima. But 'on the 20th of October we received a telegram from the British Ambassador recalling us to Tokio [*sic*], which we reached on the 22nd by train.' They stayed in Tokyo until the 7th of November, and the issue of the Kumar's quest for a Japanese bride again arose. O'Connor recorded that the Ambassador

Sir Claude Macdonald very kindly interested himself during this period in the question of the Kumar's marriage to a Japanese or Semi-Japanese lady and invited him to various dances, dinners, etc., but he finally came to the conclusion that no suitable arrangement could be made and we continued our travels.

Visits to technical schools followed and they 'attended a review of 30,000 Japanese troops on the occasion of the Emperor's birthday and official receptions at the Foreign Office and Prince Arisugau's house.' Thence they travelled to Shimonseki on the 7th of November, and on to Pusan, where they took the train to Seoul, proceeded from there to Antung and 'by the Japanese light railway to Sokakoo, thence Mukden, staying two nights and visiting the Manchu tombs on the 15th.

The next day, the Kumar took the train to Peking, arriving on the morning of the 17th, just after the death of the Emperor and the Dowager Empress had been publicly announced. Sir John Jordan, the

powerful British representative in Peking, invited them to stay at the Legation and they remained there for a fortnight 'seeing all that was possible in the somewhat unfortunate circumstances.' During this period they were able to have perhaps the most significant of encounters on the journey; an interview with the Dalai Lama, who was then in exile in China. The importance of this meeting was such that O'Connor filed a separate report on the encounter. For the Kumar it was a meeting of great religious significance and the highlight of his journey. Bell later recorded that

The matter of most interest to the Maharaj Kumar during his tour was his interviews with the Dalai Lama at Peking. He is deeply interested in the Buddhist Shrine Restoration Society of which he is Vice-President, and during his interviews with the Dalai Lama, spoke regarding the objects of this society, in which the Lama expressed much interest.³⁸

The meeting with the Tibetan leader was of tremendous personal interest and political significance for O'Connor. The Dalai Lama had remained in exile since the Younghusband mission, and after the withdrawal of the British forces from Lhasa, the Chinese had stepped into the power vacuum and imposed their authority there. With the departure of Viceroy Curzon from India and a new, anti-imperial government elected in Britain, O'Connor, the British representative in Tibet, had been left isolated in Gyantse. Lacking any support from his government, he had been unable to develop his plans for the Panchen Lama. Moreover the Chinese had forced the Tibetans to boycott the British post there, so O'Connor's position had become untenable, and he eventually had been forced to withdraw. The Trade Agency remained, and his protégé, the promising young officer F.M. Bailey, was posted to replace him. However British influence had suffered a near-terminal blow and was only salvaged by the Chinese collapse after the 1911 revolution.

The Dalai Lama, in exile in Mongolia, had hoped for Russian support for his position, but when the Russians refused to assist him diplomatically or militarily, his position had declined to the point where he was forced to seek an accommodation with the Chinese. Thus he had journeyed to Peking, where he found himself in a humiliating position as he witnessed the final days of the Manchu dynasty, whose decadence could hardly have impressed the austere Buddhist leader.

The 13th Dalai Lama had never met a British person until his arrival in Peking, and Sir John Jordan, who had little time for the Tibetans or the Tibetan policies of the Government of India, had paid only a purely formal call on him. But O'Connor, who seems to have been acting entirely on his own initiative, had no intention of restricting his meeting to diplomatic formalities. While he did not report it, there seems little doubt that O'Connor assured the Dalai Lama that the British had no objection to his return to Tibet.

What O'Connor did report is that the Kumar had 'expressed a strong desire to visit the Dalai Lama. I spoke to the British Minister who said...[he had] no objection to the visit provided it was made unofficially and that the discussion of all political topics was avoided'.³⁹ Thus on the 22nd of November 1908, they drove to the Yellow Temple accompanied by a Chinese official in charge of his presence, and conversed on general topics for ten minutes. Before they took their leave the Kumar -- who was now wearing his monastic robes -- raised the subject of the Bodh Gaya restoration, and the Dalai Lama said he would discuss that issue if they made another visit.

They returned on the 25th and talked for two hours. The Dalai Lama

spoke of his own adventures and travels since leaving Lhasa in 1904. He said that he had been much impressed by all that he had heard and seen, that he felt that he had benefited by the extended knowledge of the world, his views had widened and many of his former prejudices had been removed. It was, he said, a great pity that so few Tibetan officials ever left their own country, for that nowadays without some knowledge of the outside world it is not possible for a country to advance or prosper. There is no harm, he thinks, in the adoption of foreign manners and customs provided people preserve their own religion. During his travels in Mongolia he...had gained the affection and reverence of a large number of devotees. He hoped to strengthen this influence and to extend it still further over other Buddhist countries in the course of time.

The Dalai Lama was unhappy about the actions of China, but understood the 'necessity of avoiding friction' and 'expressed himself then as entertaining friendly sentiments towards Great Britain and being desirous of dwelling on good terms with the Indian Government.'

He then asked the Kumar about the Panchen Lama's visit to India:

how the Lama was received, entertained etc... and the Lama particularly wished to know whether the Tashi Lama had obtained any influence over Buddhists or Buddhist sympathisers in India. ...[He also stated that he expected] to meet the Tashi Lama at Nag-chu-ka on his way back to Lhasa ...[and that] on his return to Lhasa he proposed to send some Tibetan students to India to study medical and other science[s], and he asked the Kumar to assist him in this.

O'Connor reported that this was followed by a long discussion over the condition and future of Bodh Gaya and concluded by noting that 'during his travels he has learnt to speak both Chinese and Mongol'⁴⁰

Quite how much Sir John Jordan knew of all this is uncertain. He reported to the Foreign Office that he had officially informed Russia and China that the Kumar's visit to the Dalai Lama was a religious visit.⁴¹ But both nations well knew the name of O'Connor, and must have suspected intrigue.

At the Dalai Lama's suggestion the Kumar then made a five day journey to the monastery of Wu-tai-shan, but before they left, O'Connor had one more meeting that must have been one of the most remarkable of his long career on the Indian frontiers.

One of the main reasons, if it was not the main one, of the Younghusband mission was the claim by important figures in the British Indian government (not least Curzon and Younghusband), that Tibet, while rejecting ties with the British, was secretly dealing with Russia, Britain's great rival in Central Asia. The key figure, it was claimed, was Agvaan Dorzhiev, a Buriat monk with Russian citizenship, who was a close confidant of the Dalai Lama. The British were aware that Dorzhiev had travelled between Lhasa and the Tsarist Russian capital of St Petersburg bearing diplomatic messages, and they imagined him as a Machiavellian secret agent.⁴²

Now, in 1908, with the Younghusband mission and the policies it exemplified already seeming long gone history, O'Connor discovered that Dorzhiev was in Peking. With Britain and Russia having recently concluded an agreement over Central Asian affairs, O'Connor was able to meet his old adversary. In a private letter he recorded the meeting in the following words,

...there is an (apparently) very frank and above-board Russian diplomat (Mr Korostovets, the Minister) who is in almost daily communication with Dorjieff [*sic*]. He expresses the most

unexceptionable sentiments, declares that he has informed the lama that Russian interests in Tibet have ceased altogether....and that the Lama must now reconcile himself absolutely to Chinese authority by which he must inevitably be bound for the future. He even invited me over to his place one evening (after dark) to meet Dorjjeff. I went and had a three-cornered conversation lasting an hour. It was an amusing anticlimax to all our Tibetan schemes – our mission, our military expedition, the fighting, slaughter, destruction of property, heart-burnings and hard work. Here we were sitting quietly round a table in the Russian Legation at Peking – the Russian Minister, Dorjjeff, the sinister figure who loomed so large in Central Asian politics a few years ago, and nearly set three great powers by the ears, and poor I who was caught up in the great events and used for a time – chatting amicably over the dry bones of a dead policy. Dorjjeff and Korostovets in Russian, K. and I in English and French, and Dorjjeff and I in Tibetan. Korostovets talked a great deal (he is a voluble man) and, as I say, his sentiments were beyond cavil. I said as little as possible: told Dorjjeff I was pleased to meet him, but that England now had no policy in Tibet except to remain on friendly terms with Tibet and China. Poor Dorjjeff quite sees the point of view. There is no doubt that he and the Lama dislike the Chinese and would be delighted to see the last of them. But as there is no-one else to turn to and Tibet cannot stand alone, they must swallow their pill and be good boys under the Amban's dictation.

I enclose a photo of Dorjjeff (taken some years ago) which Rockhill gave me. Isn't he a desperate character? He looks much the same now but a good deal older (he is 55). He is still the chief advisor and confident of the Dalai Lama and is apparently on very intimate terms with the Russians. He says he is not going back to Lhasa with the Lama.

As far as one can judge, the future tranquillity of Tibet depends entirely upon the ability of the Chinese effectually to maintain their influence there. There can be no doubt, I think, that there is a strong anti-Chinese party in the country, who, after the return of the Lama to Lhasa, will make trouble if they can find an excuse or if China is too weak to prevent them. Whereas, if China is strong she can, of course, reduce them to insignificance.

This is probably the last word I shall write on Tibetan matters. *Requiescat[?] in pace.*⁴³

* * *

The Kumar's tour was nearing its conclusion, and for O'Connor the highlights had doubtless passed. But they stayed at the monastery of Wu-tai-shan, where they found that '[m]ost of the monks are Chinese and Mongols but we were fortunate enough to find one or two Tibetans with whom we could converse.' On their return to Jankow, which they reached on the 16th of December, they were entertained by the Consul General, a Mr Fraser, and then took a steamer to Shanghai. The voyage was not without excitement for as O'Connor noted

We reached Nan-king after having been delayed nearly 24 hours through the steamer running into the bank of the river. We left the boat at Nan-king and went by rail to Shanghai.

On the 22nd they left for Hong Kong 'where we landed and spent the night ashore, dining with the Governor, Sir Frederick Lugard.' On the 26th they sailed to Singapore and on New Year's Day they sailed on the *S.S. Lindula*, arriving in Rangoon on the 6th of January.

They halted there for five days to enable the Maharajah Kumar to address a meeting of Burmese Buddhists on the subject of the Buddhist Shrine Restoration Society, and dined with the Lieutenant-Governor. On the 11th of January they sailed on the *S.S. Bangala* to Calcutta, arriving there on the 14th, and 12 days later the Maharaja left for Siliguri and a return to his homeland. He reached Gangtok on the 12th of February.

O'Connor seemed to have enjoyed his travels, and ironically, given that in retirement (following financial difficulties after the Wall Street Crash) he worked as a tour guide in the Himalayas, he recorded that 'I am becoming quite an expert at checking baggage... I am thinking of applying to Cook's for a job later on as highly qualified.'⁴⁴

Of the results of the tour he reported on the Kumar that

It was only after we had left England in July last that I began adequately to realise the defective nature of his general education and his ignorance of the elements of school-boy knowledge... On taking stock of his acquirements I found that he had received virtually no education at all... neither history

nor science nor mathematics... . His was the mind of a child; and it was necessary ... to commence the discussion of any subject from the simplest and lowest standpoint... [but]... Whilst far from clever, the Kumar is genuinely anxious to acquire information, and is patient and pains-taking [*sic*] at any task he takes up.

He [now] displays, I think, a quickened intelligence, and has at any rate learnt of the existence of many fascinating fields of knowledge which remain for him to explore. In a word his intellectual curiosity has been aroused and his facilities stimulated... and is anxious to make up for the time which, to his own great regret, has been squandered in the past.⁴⁵

On his return to Sikkim, the Kumar was given an opportunity to influence Sikkim's future. He was appointed as Vice-President of the State Council and placed in charge of the departments of education and forests, in addition to being given religious control of the monasteries.⁴⁶

There was, however, one matter outstanding. While the Kumar had ended his world tour, he had not succeeded in finding a wife despite continuing efforts during the Asian leg of his travels. O'Connor had helped as best he could, joking that he was 'now ... beginning to qualify in another sphere, that of matrimonial agent.'⁴⁷ From Tokyo he had reported that the Kumar had discussed the possibility of marrying a lady of mixed Japanese and English origin with the British Ambassador, who thought a pure Japanese better. The Kumar was said to have stated that 'he does not contemplate marriage with Burmese, Thibetan or other Buddhist lady, and fears that he must remain unmarried if his wishes are not met.' Bell, now the Political Officer in Sikkim, agreed and was concerned that the 'Kumar would become discontented if his wishes are frustrated.' The Viceroy now concluded that a Japanese wife was acceptable if the Sikkim Durbar had no objection, but if they did the idea should be dropped. He ordered that 'Japanese families consulted should be informed fully of disadvantages of life in Sikkim for a foreign wife.' These instructions were conveyed to O'Connor.⁴⁸

There was, however, an objection from Sikkim. Bell reported that

His Highness the Maharajah objects, as I had surmised, to the proposed marriage. His contention is that the Maharaj Kumar, being an incarnation of Buddha, should not marry at all, and

should not take part in worldly affairs but should devote himself entirely to religious exercises.⁴⁹

But Bell pointed out that the previous Kumar had married and that the Maharajah would probably accept it as long as the lady was a Buddhist, although he preferred the customary Tibetan wife. In fact, according to Bell it was actually Her Highness the Maharani who was

the guiding spirit in opposition to the Maharajah-Kumar, as she would like her own son to succeed to the Gadi and the Kumar's marriage will still further remove this boy's chance. In this as in other matters both the Maharajah and the members of the Durbar follow her lead.⁵⁰

Bell concluded that

The chief desiderata in such a wife are that she should not be prone to intrigue, that she should be of an economical disposition, as the Maharaj-Kumar himself is, for Sikkim is a poor State, that she should not be too fond of society, for Gangtok is a small and isolated place, and that she should be content with one or two only of her fellow country-women as servants.⁵¹

A month later, however, Bell reported that the Kumar was not entirely opposed to a Tibetan wife - 'it transpires that shortly before the Maharaj Kumar left England for America he wrote to one of the Sikkim lamas to send an emissary to Tibet to enquire as to the possibility of obtaining a Tibetan wife.' A daughter of the aristocratic Lha-gya-ri family was thought suitable and the Kumar had been asked for Rs. 12,000 'as preliminary expenses.'⁵²

Six months later no progress had been made. The British Ambassador in Japan had failed to find a suitable match and the discussions with the Lha-gya-ri family had fallen through.⁵³ No suitable ladies could be found in Bhutan and the Kumar's thoughts turned further east. Bell requested of his government 'that enquires be made as to suitable ladies of aristocratic lineage in Burma and Siam. In the present circumstances a Burmese wife would be preferable to one from either Tibet or Siam, as Burma is under British rule.' A number of possibilities were explored by the officials in Burma; four Shan ladies were reported to be 'so far as I can judge, moral and well brought up

and moderately good-looking', but the most promising candidates were found in the family in the Limbin Mintha, who were then residing in Allahabad.⁵⁴

There were four daughters in the family, and they were 'English-speaking', which was an important consideration. So enquiries were made of these girls, and the Government of India enquired of the Uttar Pradesh government

whether in the opinion of His Honour, the Lieutenant-Governor, such a marriage would be acceptable to the Limbin Mintha, and, if so, which of the ladies would be likely to prove the most suitable wife for a young man of the Maharaja-Kumar's age, temperament and education. He is 33 years old, is a devout Buddhist of quiet and amenable character, simple and retiring in his habits, but appreciative of congenial society.

Discrete enquiries revealed that two of the girls seemed suitable:

The latter is of more vivacious disposition than her elder sister. Both are extremely nice girls, well educated, of good manners and dispositions, with an excellent knowledge of English and not without accomplishments....people would ... while liking them both, express some slight preference for the younger girl.

This seemed promising. The Kumar set out for Allahabad, officially to view 'the Exhibition', but in reality to meet the young ladies. Unfortunately on his return Bell had to report that 'the Maharaj Kumar has been to Allahabad and has met the daughters of the Limbin Mintha. He informs me that he does not desire marriage with any of them. He is at present undecided as to his future action.' An unsigned file note on Bell's correspondence concluded that 'It is sad that the reality seems to have fallen short of the hopes raised by ...[the] flattering testimonial.'

The Kumar's thoughts turned again to Japan. He wrote to a Mr Davidson in Tokyo:

You will be surprised to hear from me after such a long time since we have met last at Tokyo. ... I would like to ask you a favour that is you know I have a great ambition to marry a Japanese lady as I know they are much more enlightened and educated than any other women on this side of the world.

During these last 2 years I tried to find a suitable lady from India, Burma and Tibet.

But I regret to say that I could not find any suitable one up to date ... [and I had to leave Japan] before I had sufficient opportunity of seeing and making acquaintance with any respectable families.

There is no-one that I know of who knows so much about the Japanese people than yourself.

I shall be so grateful to you if you will kindly let me know if there is any suitable, good-looking lady that you know of. It would be still nice if photographs could be secured and sent to me. Of course she must be able to speak English well, else she won't be any use to me.

I wonder whether you are acquainted to Count Otani of Nishihong-wanji at Kyoto, as I know him well. He writes to me sometimes. I wonder whether there is any suitable young lady who are relative of him.[*sic*] ... I am sending you a Tibetan purse with some Tibetan coins and also a cutting of the Dalai Lama's seal. I hope you will accept this curio as a Xmas present from me.⁵⁵

By this time however Anglo-Japanese relations were in decline and the Viceroy stated that he 'should prefer that idea be discouraged.' It was noted that Japan was active in China and Turkestan, there were reports of mysterious journeys by Japanese travellers and of a Japanese community established on the Yunnan border under the protection of a local noble prominent in the revolution. Thus it seemed 'wiser not to put them in a position from which Tibet and Nepal would be easy of access.'⁵⁶

The Government then made further enquiries in Burma, Kashmir, Ladakh and the smaller Buddhist states such as Zanskar, requesting confidential enquiries be made and photographs of any suitable brides forwarded to Sikkim.⁵⁷ One possibility emerged in Kashmir, where the Resident reported that the Wazir Wazarat of Ladakh had recommended one candidate. The Wazir had reported that

the most respectable family of Buddhists in Ladakh, Zanskar and Purig is that of the Rajah of Stok, whose grandfather Giapu Tanduf Namgial was the ruler of Ladakh at the time of conquest. He has no daughter of his own; but his cousin Rajah

Tashi Lawang of Mathu has a grown-up daughter who I should think would be a suitable spouse.

The Wazir had discussed the matter with the Raja of Stok and the Kushuk Bakula of Zanskar – from the other branch of her family – but

they know absolutely nothing of the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim nor have enough means to enter into matrimonial alliances with ruling Chiefs. For this reason they do not know how to start the negotiations.

But they were arranging for a photo and the Kushak asked for more information about the Kumar! The lady concerned was then 16 years of age, and was said to be ‘a lady of very refined manners according to Tibetan civilization and is also said to be good looking,’ but she was also illiterate, far from wealthy and spoke only Ladakhi. While a photo of her was requested, the matter lapsed.

Instead, the Maharajah Kumar thought again about one of the daughters of the Limin Mintha. In January 1913 he requested permission from the Government of India to visit the Buddhist shrines of Kathmandu and then to journey to Rangoon for 2-3 weeks to meet the 3rd daughter of the family, who had returned to Burma from Allahabad. The Political Officer reported that ‘after seeing something of this lady he may decide to propose marriage to her.’⁵⁸

Nepal was too concerned with its own forthcoming royal installation for it to be a convenient time for the Kumar to visit Kathmandu, and so the Kumar sailed from Calcutta to Burma and stayed in the Mansion Hotel in Rangoon while he re-considered the young lady as a potential wife. On his return to Gangtok on the 12th of March 1913, the Maharajah Kumar informed Charles Bell that he wished to marry Teik Tin Ma Lat, the 2nd daughter of the Limbin Mintha. He had seen the parents in Rangoon and they had agreed to the match, but informed the Kumar that Burmese custom was for the groom’s parents to ask the brides parent’s for their daughter’s hand.⁵⁹

Burmese custom created a new problem. Bell and the Kumar spoke to the Maharaja on the 14th, asking him to write to the girl’s parents requesting their daughter’s hand. But the Maharajah refused to do so! He repeated his objection to the Kumar marrying at all. Bell reported to his Government that the ‘Maharaja is obdurate in this matter and will no doubt always remain so.’⁶⁰

Then the prospective bride herself took a hand. Ma Lat wrote to the Kumar saying she wanted to marry him, and she suggested that Bell ask the Government of Burma to approach the parents, which Bell agreed to do. But Kumar wanted the Government of India to tell the Maharaja that they did not agree with his desire to prevent a marriage, something Bell doubted was advisable.⁶¹

The Government of India then informed the Government of Burma that 'The Government of India cannot for obvious reasons act *in loco parentis* in the manner desired by the Maharaj Kumar. But they have every sympathy for the latter in his present difficulties.' They wanted the situation explained to the lady's parents, 'who may be informed that the Government of India has no objection to the match.'⁶²

The Assistant Commissioner of Police in Rangoon thus informed the Limbin Mintha of this and the father of the 19 year old, 'English-speaking' Ma Lat wrote in response that

I have the honour to say that the Limbin Minthame and I give our consent to a marriage between our daughter Ma Lat and the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim. We regret that His Highness the Maharajah should not desire the proposed union, but as both the parties to it are of age and agree, and that the Government of India approve, we consider that there is no obstacle to the marriage and trust that it may take place when details have hereafter been arranged.⁶³

* * *

It is at that point that the India Office file on the Kumar's travels in search of education and a wife, comes to an end. And there is no happy postscript to the tale. The marriage to Ma Lat did not take place. Instead the Kumar followed the traditions of his ancestors and married Cheoni Wangmo, a lady from the Tibetan aristocracy. A few months later the Kumar succeeded his father as Maharajah of Sikkim after the latter's death in February 1914, but the young man himself died on 5th December of that year, apparently from the effects of a fever while suffering from jaundice.⁶⁴ Cheoni Wangmo travelled to Bodh Gaya and Benares to burn butter lamps in his memory and he was succeeded as Maharajah by his younger half-brother Tashi Namgyal.⁶⁵

Ultimately the effort expended by the British, and the dreams of the young Kumar, had no lasting effect on the history of Sikkim. But a study of the manner by which his education proceeded tells us much

about the aims and methods of the British colonial state in South Asia, the responses of the indigenous elites, and the extent to which events and processes in the Indo-Tibetan Himalayas were interconnected. It also sheds an interesting light on the difficulties faced by the Himalayan aristocracy in finding suitable marriage partners, and the diplomatic considerations involved in these alliances.

NOTES

1. *History of Sikkim* [hereafter, *History...*]; compiled by His Highness the Maharajah Sir Thutob Namgyal (KCIE) and Maharani Yeshay Dolma of Sikkim, unpublished manuscript translated by Kazi Dousandup [sic], 1908, p. 71.
2. I have discussed White's career and character at length in two works; 'The Establishment of the British Trade Agencies in Tibet 1904-1909: A Survey', in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3.2.3, 1992; and, *Tibet and the British Raj: the frontier cadre 1904-1947*, Richmond (U.K.), 1997; also see A.J.K. Singh, *Himalayan triangle; A historical survey of British India's relations with Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan 1765-1950*, London 1988, p. 229-33.
3. *History...* pp. 98-142; this work ends on a positive note concerning White and his career in Sikkim, clearly a diplomatic fiction.
4. Oriental and India Office Collection [hereafter OIOC], L/P&S/10/92- 564, O'Connor to [Government of] India, 4 February 1909, 'Diary of events connected with the Kumar's tour.' This paper is based on OIOC file reference L/P&S/10-92, which contains virtually all relevant correspondence; to avoid repetition hereafter I thus cite only the appropriate file reference number.
5. Croft was the key figure behind the opening of the Bhutia Boarding school at Darjeeling in 1874. The school was specifically intended to develop local youths who could mediate in dealings with the Raj's northern neighbours; P.Waller, *The Pundits: British Exploration of Tibet and Central Asia*, Lexington, (Kentucky), 1990 p. 193, quoting National Archives of India, Foreign Department Secret, January 1882, 722-725, Sir Alfred Croft to A.C. Lyall, 12 April 1879, pp. 194 & fn.8, p. 292.
6. Chandra Das, the first headmaster of the Bhutia school, travelled to Lhasa in 1881-82 on an intelligence-gathering mission for the British. He was subsequently *persona non grata* in Tibet, but remained in Darjeeling as an authority on Tibet, although he was not highly regarded by Curzon and Younghusband and was consulted only in an academic capacity in that era. Chandra Das wrote a number of accounts of his travels, but for a critical analysis of the details and consequences of his 1881-82 mission, see Alex McKay, 'The Drowning of Lama Sengchen Kyabying: A Preliminary Enquiry from British Sources', in *Tibet Past and Present: Tibetan Studies I. the Proceedings of the 9th International Seminar for Tibetan Studies, Leiden 2000*, H. Blezer (Gen. Ed.), Leiden 2002.

7. 10-92-1485, Sidkeong Tulku, Maharajah Kumar of Sikkim to White, 23 August 1905; 10-92-564, O'Connor to the Government of India, 4 February 1909; 'Diary of events connected with the Kumar's tour.'
8. White, *Sikkim and Bhutan*, pp. 45-48; Singh, *Himalayan Triangle...*, p. 247: *History*, p. 127, states that 'The Maharajah was ready to go, but Mr White however thought that His Highness having never before that Visited the Plains and not used to European etiquettes and customs would not do very well for the occasion, as the Railway Journey would be long, and the place crowded, so it would be trying to His Highness's health and nerves to attend the Durbar.[sic]' It goes on to note that the Maharajah was concerned about the effects of his non-attendance on his status and official income.
9. See McKay *op cit*, 1992, 1997.
10. On which see McKay 1997; also see A. Lamb, *British India and Tibet. 1766-1910*, London 1986.
11. The Prince of Wales, who was then touring India, met the Panchen Lama, but it is unclear whether he also met the Kumar; there is no reference to it in the *History*....
12. 10-92-1485: Maharajah Kumar to J.C.White, 23 August 1905.
13. Bell was later involved in the sending of four Tibetan boys to Rugby school in England. The influence of the Political Officers is surely suggested by the Kumar's statement regarding expenses being kept as low as possible.
14. 10-92-1485, Maharajah Kumar to White, 23 August 1905.
15. 10-92-1485, White to India, 20 March 1906.
16. 10-92-1485, [Foreign Secretary] Louis Dane to the India Office, 9 August 1906. By this period, the appearance in British society of numerous members of Indian 'royalty', many of whom were of very minor status in India, was being viewed with disfavour in official circles. But see C.Wylie, note of 4 October 1906, which states that the Kumar 'wishes to get into "good society" and is desirous of assistance in doing so – a matter which presents some difficulties.'
17. 10-92-1485, letter headed 'United Services Club Simla', to Lt-Col Sir Curzon Wylie at the India Office, 15 August 1906 [page with signature is missing], original emphasis.
18. Viceroy to the India Office, 14 September 1906.
19. 10-92-2534, Blackiston to Wylie, 22 January 1907.
20. Charles Bell to Ritchie [India Office], 7 May 1907.
21. 10-92-3146, 'Kumar's accounts for November 1907.'
22. 10-92-2802, Admiralty to the India Office, 20 March 1907; Blackiston to Wylie, 24 March 1907.
23. 10-92-1455, Political Department reference paper, 3 October 1907, from Wylie to Ritchie.
24. 10-92-935, White to India, 1 April 1907.
25. 10-92-1553, 'Note by the Political ADC', W.H.Wylie, 10 December 1907.
26. *Ibid*, Maharajah Kumar to White, 5 November 1906.
27. 10-92-1455, White to Ritchie, 27 August 1907.
28. 10-92-379, [Ambassador] Claude Macdonald to Colin Campbell, India Office, 28 March 1907; file note by Ritchie, 26 April 1907.
29. 10-92-1553, 'Note by the Political ADC', W.H.Wylie, 10 December 1907.

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30. *Ibid.* Dane to Maharajah Kumar, 19 August 1907.
 31. *Ibid.* Maharajah Kumar to India, 3 October 1907
 32. *Ibid.* Maharajah Kumar to Wylie, 19 January 1908; Wylie minute paper of 22 January 1908.
 33. Typically, the government only sanctioned an expenditure of £1,500, which was exceeded by more than 6,000 rupees. As much of that was due to religious donations, and religious objects purchased, however, the matter was passed over; 10-92-1257; 10-92-1289, 'Administration Report of the Sikkim State for 1908-1909'; 10-92-265, India to Secretary of State, 27 January 1910.
 34. 10-92-3378, O'Connor's 'proposed itinerary', 11 June 1908 ; 10-92-411, Viceroy to the India Office, 18 September 1908.
 35. This and the following section is taken from 10-92-564, O'Connor to India, 4 February 1909, 'Diary of events connected with the Kumar's tour'.
 36. *Ibid.*
 37. See S. Berry, *Monks, Spies and a Soldier of Fortune: The Japanese in Tibet*, London, 1995; also see Sir F. O'Connor, *On the Frontier and Beyond: A Record of Thirty Years Service*, London 1931.
 38. 10-92-1289, 'Administration Report of the Sikkim State for 1908-1909'.
 39. 10-92-2826, O'Connor's 'Confidential memo on Kumar's visit to Peking', 1 December 1908.
 40. *Ibid.*, 'Memorandum on an interview between the Dalai Lama and the Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim held at the Yellow Temple Peking on November 25, 1908', by W.F. O'Connor
 41. 10-92-2943, [Ambassador] J.N. Jordan to Sir Edward Grey, 2 December 1908.
 42. Only with the publication of John Snelling's *Buddhism in Russia: The story of Agvan Dorzhiev, Lhasa's Emissary to the Tsar*, Shaftsbury, (U.K.), 1993, has Dorzhiev's actual role emerged. That work relied heavily on research by Alex Andreyev in St Petersburg, whose own work is forthcoming (Brill, 2003) and adds considerably to Snelling's work, particularly in regard to Dorzhiev's work in the 1920s.
 43. 10-92-2826, extract from a private letter from O'Connor to Sir R. Ritchie, Peking, 1 December 1908; while it seemed an appropriate conclusion, O'Connor did have some later involvement with Tibet, including a brief term as Political Officer Sikkim in 1921; see McKay 1997.
 44. 10-92-3498, O'Connor to Curzon Wylie; date (like so much of O'Connor's handwriting) indecipherable.
 45. 10-92-564, O'Connor to India, 4 February 1909, 'Diary of events connected with the Kumar's tour.'
 46. 10-92-1289, Administration Report of the Sikkim State for 1908-1909.
 47. See note 42.
 48. 10-92-1802, Viceroy to the India Office, 25 September 1908, and reply of 30 September 1908; instructions to O'Connor dated 17 October 1908.
 49. 10-92-2030, Bell to India, 5 October 1908, replying to query of 2 October 1908.
 50. *Ibid.*
 51. *Ibid.*

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52. 10-92-2207, Bell to India, 24 November 1908.
 53. 10-92-4246, note by Claude Macdonald, 13 November 1908; 10-92-889, Bell to India, 12 May 1909.
 54. 10-92-632, Bell to India, 5 July 1910 and related correspondence.
 55. 10-92-169, Maharajah Kumar to a Mr Davidson, 22 November 1911.
 56. 10-92-233, Viceroy to the India Office, 23 January 1912; undated/signed Foreign Office minute, ca. Feb 1912.
 57. 10-92-1105, Bell to India, 11 April 1911, enclosing Maharajah Kumar to Bell, 23 March 1911 and related correspondence. For the Ladakhi perspective on these events, see Nawang Tsering Shakspo, 'Ladakh's Relations with other Himalayan Kingdoms', in Steinkellner, E., (Gen.Ed.), *Tibetan Studies II*, Wien (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften), 1997, pp.669-76.
 58. 10-92-687, Political Officer Sikkim to India, 26 January 1913, and India to Maharajah Kumar, 31 January 1913.
 59. 10-92-2584, Bell to India, 29 March 1913.
 60. *Ibid.*
 61. *Ibid.*
10-92-2584, R. Chenevix Trench (Government of India), to W.F. Rice (Government of Burma) 16 April 1913.
 63. *Ibid.*, Rice to India, 21 May 1913.
 64. OIOC, V/10/1977, Administration Report of the Sikkim State for 1914-1915; there were the usual rumours of poisoning that seemingly accompany the early death of any important figure in Himalayan history.
 65. Singh, *Himalayan triangle...*, p. 256, reports that the young *tulku*'s ideas on land reform were not popular with the Sikkimese aristocracy; as she notes [n.385, p.285], one Indian writer has claimed that Bell did not like either the Kumar or his ideas, stating that, 'His death was as much a relief to the Political Officer as it was to the Kazis and monks.'; see Lal Bahadur Basnet, *Sikkim: A Short Political History*, New Delhi 1974, p. 64. There is nothing in the file on which this article is based to support that conclusion.

THE BRAG DKAR PA FAMILY AND G. YANG THANG RDZONG:
AN EXAMPLE OF INTERNAL ALLIANCES IN SIKKIM¹

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Introduction

The formation of a political alliance results from a wide variety of contexts and circumstances, and may be driven, for example, by political necessity and common cultural, physical, emotional or economic bonds. So the term 'alliance' actually represents a rather complex and broad spectrum of social, political, economic or cultural issues, which when expressed in a similar way by people can act as a bond by which social groups are formed around some shared interest(s). Therefore, when analyzing the nature of internal relations and alliances in Sikkim one is drawn into a process which aims to understand the nature of these contexts.

In other words, in order to understand alliances, we have to understand the contexts which have helped to shape and develop them. However, one constantly has to be aware that changes in these contexts necessitate a change or re-formulation of the nature of the alliance as by definition an alliance is not a permanent thing. Associations of this nature shift and adapt according to changes taking place within a wide variety of social contexts, such as far-reaching political, religious or economic transformations or a change in the focus of individuals or groups. For example, Bhutan and Sikkim formed a strong alliance in response to the mutual threat of Nepalese eastern expansion in the 1780s and 90s. However, the preceding decades of the eighteenth century were characterized by Bhutanese and Sikkimese conflict. In a similar way, not only did the internal alliances of Sikkim in the

¹ The author would like to express his gratitude to Mr. D. N. Tarkapa of Yangthang Dzong, without whose assistance this work would have been but a dream. He kindly showed me around the Dzong and allowed me to have access to the principle documents used here and to take a number of photos of weapons seized during the Bhutanese and Nepalese invasions of Sikkim. I would also like to thank Mr Wangdue of Pelling who took great interest in my work and for his knowledgeable and insightful discussions on this area of Sikkimese History, Charles Ramble for his advice and guidance, Brigitte Steinmann who invited me to Paris to present this paper and to Miss Tsering Wangmo of Gangtok for all her help and assistance.

eighteenth century undergo a process of change relating to wider socio-political changes in the region, but Tibetan and Sikkimese relations were also affected. The documents on which this presentation is based indicate the importance of these internal alliances as well as making passing reference to the wider alliances between Tibet and Sikkim.

Two principal documents from the Brag dkar pa collection form the basis of this short assessment of internal Sikkimese alliances: document YA4 dated by Dieter Schuh as 1785, although the date of this text should be 1784, and Document YA8 dated 1796.² These documents are set in the period of the Gorkha invasion of Sikkim and Nepal's eastern expansion. While they make passing reference to the events of this period, they are in essence land documents, which reinforce the internal alliance between the Brag dkar pa family and the Sikkimese state. Furthermore, they provide interesting although select information relating to the nature of Tibetan and Sikkimese relations.

Since little work has been done on this area of Sikkimese history, this paper is really designed to contextualize this period and raise some important questions on the complexity of internal political alliances as well as wider associations and relations between Tibet and Sikkim. Since the primary source materials of this paper are land documents, other issues which represent alliances such as marital relations have not been addressed here. It may be interesting to note, however, that political marriage unions did exist between the Brag dkar pa family and other leading families in Sikkim and it is hoped that these alliances will be addressed specifically in a later paper.

² Schuh gives the date of 1785 for document YA4 but this seems to have resulted from a misreading of shing 'brug for shing sbrul. These documents can be found in Schuh and Dagyab: 1978 *Urkunden, Erlasse und Sendschrieben aus dem Besitz sikkimesischer Adelshauser und des Kolsters Phodang*: 17-34 and 43-50. Another important text will also be referred to here, document YA1, which was issued by the finance ministry of the bKa' shag of the Government of Lhasa. This text has been left undated by Schuh and Dagyab, although the text itself gives the year of writing as shing bya (wood – bird). The date of this text is hard to establish as the context provides only a few clues as to the possible date of the writing of this text, so we are left with only two probable dates of 1765 or 1885. However, the issue of grain and gifts to the Brag dkar pa family mentioned in this document (YA1) probably refers to the compensation given to the family by the Tibetan Government for not heeding the requests of the Sikkimese government after the Gorkha Tibetan war, to return the lands annexed by the Gorkhas during the invasion of 1788. As it states in YA8 that the grain levied as tax on the Bhutanese territories of Phag ri, would be granted to the Brag dkar pa family. So the date of this document should be similar to that of YA8 so perhaps shing bya should read Ichags bya i.e. 1801.

In this paper, one section focuses on clarifying the confusion relating to the extent of Nepalese territorial gains after the invasion of Sikkim in 1788, for prior to the invasion of Sikkim these lands were under the control of the Brag dkar pa family and thus the reaction of the Sikkimese government to such a loss of territory will be an important indication of the closeness of the alliance between the Chos rgyal and the Brag dkar pa family.

Historical background

Eighteenth century Sikkim was afflicted by internal discord and external pressures on its territorial integrity. The first Bhutanese invasion in the early years of the eighteenth century, which was instigated by the sister of the third Chos rgyal Phyag rdor rnam rgyal, was one of a series of international conflicts that continued until the end of the century³. This action arose out of a dispute over the royal succession, and such disputes became a matter of course during the eighteenth century as competing factions vying for political dominance used and manipulated the royal succession for the advancement of their aims. This fragility of the young Sikkimese state was exacerbated by external pressures on both its western (Nepal) and eastern (Bhutan) boundaries.

Furthermore, as a result of the weakness of the Sikkimese state in counteracting these external pressures, it became necessary for the government to both reinforce its internal alliances and strengthen relations with Tibet for times when Tibetan assistance was needed. Tibetan support during this period took a number of different forms, such as granting refuge to the chos rgyals, pressurizing the Bhutanese, sending officials to organize and manage the state and military apparatus and give military and financial support. The first example of this support is to be found during the period of the Bhutanese invasion.

During the time of the first Bhutanese war, the Brag dkar pa family makes its initial appearance in the politics of Sikkim. As it states in

³ With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that the eighteenth century was a 'make or break' period in the political evolution of Sikkimese statehood. The conflicts of the eighteenth century severely weakened not only the internal political establishments of the state but also the territorial integrity of Sikkim and had it not been for the desires of the British to open and exploit trading opportunities in Tibet and China, the fate of Sikkim could have been similar to that of the Himalayan states of eastern Nepal.

'*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*, and documents YA4 and YA8 of the Brag dkar pa collection, Ka rma dar rgyas brag dkar pa assisted the Sikkimese during the first Bhutanese war by acting as general of the Sikkimese forces from Rabs ldan rtse to Gangtok. In document YA8 of the Brag dkar pa collection it states that the younger brother of a regional administrator of the Tibetan government was sent by the government of Tibet after a request made by the Sikkimese:

⁴Since from this place (Sikkim) it was requested to the government capital of the great dGan ldan pho brang (the Tibetan government) asking for care (in this time of political unrest), it was given as an order of the spiritual leader⁵ that the younger brother of Brag dkar mi dpon of dBus (is to act) as the companion of the law and by order of the spiritual leader (he) was dispatched.⁶

It may be interesting to note that in my conversations with the current head of the Brag dkar pa family, Mr. D. N. Tarkapa, the person mentioned in this text was none other than Ka rma dar rgyas. The reason a person capable of leading Sikkim was requested from Tibet was due to the fact that the Chos rgyal phyag rdor rnam rgyal had escaped to Tibet after various political intrigues at the Sikkimese court and the attempts of the Bhutanese, backed by the Chos rgyal own sister, to assassinate him. Furthermore most of Sikkim at that time was under the control of the Bhutanese.

In the absence of the King, Ka rma dar rgyas is said to have acted as regent of the state as well as general of the army, and in this role succeeded in killing the Bhutanese military leader⁷ (figure 1), pushed the forces of Bhutan back and maintained the independence of Sikkim.⁸ As a result of these actions it is said in the '*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* that

⁴ Tib. *Gshungs sa dga' ldan pho brang chen por skyid sdug snyan zhu kyi ljongs 'di'i 'tsho 'dzin khrims kyi zung zlar dbus brag dkar mi dpon gyi chung po bla lha'i lung babs bla dpon bkas mngag*. YA8 line 7.

⁵ Presumably the Dalai Lama or the regent of Tibet.

⁶ Document YA8. This younger brother was more than likely a low level district administrator of the central Tibetan government, with a loose connection to the political centre of Lhasa. This conclusion rests primarily on evidence of similar deputations from Lhasa to other outlying Himalayan dependencies such as in Mustang. (Personal conversation with Dr Charles Ramble).

⁷ '*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*: 68-69 (Tibetan version). It also states that Ka rma dar rgyas severed the head of the general.

⁸ *Ibid.*

he was rewarded with an estate in Sikkim.⁹ However, this grant of an estate also reflects the need of the Chos rgyal and his allies to defuse potential political opponents. By giving Ka rma dar rgyas rulership over a large estate (in what is now West Sikkim) extending to Darjeeling, he had assured the loyalty of a person with immense political influence and the means to challenge the position of the Chos rgyal and his associates. As a result of this gift of an estate to the Brag dkar pa family, a member of a Sikkimese aristocratic family was sent to Tibet to serve the government of Lhasa.¹⁰ While this exchange of ranking officials served to strengthen the alliance between Tibet and Sikkim, it also legitimized the grant of land bestowed upon the Brag dkar pa family. Whereas Tibet did not really benefit from such an exchange, Sikkim managed to acquire a powerful individual, who, through his association with Tibet and the Tibetan government, was highly influential in Sikkimese politics.

⁹ However, the text referred to in *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* (Tibetan version *ibid.*), seems, at least in part, to be taken verbatim from YA8, which is a much later document. Those wishing to inspect this discrepancy further are directed to lines 10-12 of YA8 and *ibid.*

¹⁰ Conversation with D. N. Tarkapa. D. N. Tarkapa also informed me that he is obliged by tradition (and presumably earlier law) to carry out the Bon rituals of the Sikkimese minister who was sent to Tibet in exchange for his ancestor Ka rma dar rgyas and up until the Chinese invasion of Tibet in the 1950s the local rituals of his ancestors in Tibet were carried out by the Sikkimese official. Every year D. N. Tarkapa performs the ritual sacrifice of livestock. It is interesting to note that this 'exchange' of officials is remarkably similar to the form of taxation which applied to the noble families of Tibet as Carrasco states: 'In return for the landed estates with which they are endowed, each noble family has to give one...of their members to the service of the government. This is considered their tax...' *Land and polity in Tibet*: 1959: 131. Since this tax was levied against the Sikkimese government this may indicate a period of vassalage to the Tibetan state.



Figure 1. The helmet and sword of the Bhutanese general killed by Karma dar rgyas. The sword and helmet were taken as a trophy to g.Yang thang where they are still preserved by D.N. Tarkapa.

The documents

The time period in which these documents fall (1785–1796) was particularly turbulent, not only for Sikkim but also for Tibet and Bhutan. Political developments resulting from the expansion of Nepal, undermined and threatened the regional status quo. The Nepalese invasion of Tibet in 1792 forced the Tibetans to seek military aid from China, which had the effect of changing the political relationship between those two countries. Furthermore, as a result of these significant developments in central Tibet, Tibet became more concerned about its internal politics which in turn had ramifications on the nature of Tibetan and Sikkimese relations. Sikkim had also been under considerable threat since the 1770s from both Nepal, which had taken possession of territory which the Sikkimese considered to be theirs in 1774, and Bhutan.¹¹ Thus areas of Sikkimese political influence, if not actual control, were being squeezed and annexed by

¹¹ Pradhan: 1991: 123. Pradhan clearly states that the objective of this annexation of territory, loosely affiliated with Sikkim, was to gain possession of the fertile Terai to the west of the River Tista. This territory was basically the Limbuana region, which, despite Sikkimese claims, had remained autonomous of the Sikkimese state.

the expansion of both Nepal and Bhutan. The first document to be discussed was written within this wider political context and before the actual Nepalese invasion of Sikkim in 1788 whereas the second document was written after the chaos of the Nepalese invasion of Sikkim and the Nepalese–Tibetan war of 1790-1792.

Given this wider political context of external threat, document YA4 could best be considered as a reminder to the Brag dkar pa family of the loyalty of their ancestors. The document is mainly concerned with the verification of lands already bestowed upon the ancestors of the Brag dkar pa family and includes references to the history behind the acquisition of these regions rather than the issuing of new lands to the family. It is therefore possible to suggest that the issuing of this document to the Brag dkar pa family resulted from the wish of the Chos rgyal and his advisors to gauge the extent of support they could rely on in the event of a war and to remind key political figures of the possible benefits of remaining loyal to the Chos rgyal. For example, this particular document makes extended references to the lands that Karma dar rgyas received for his action during the Bhutanese invasion of the early years of the eighteenth century. In essence this document serves to highlight the alliance that existed between the Brag dkar pa family and the Sikkimese state and assures Tshangs rin 'dzin, the head of Brag dkar pa family at this time, of his position.

The reason for doing this is quite clear. The threat posed by the Nepalese was severe as, according to Pradhan, the Gorkhas desired to control trans-Himalayan trade and had secured a treaty from Tibet to that effect in 1775. However, by 1784 the Tibetans opened a trade route with Sikkim through the Chumbi valley in order to get around the high taxes levied against Tibetan traders through the Nepalese routes.¹² This heightened the possibility of a war between Sikkim and Nepal as Nepal had quite clear designs to run a monopoly of Himalayan trade. Furthermore, taking Sikkim out of the equation would stop attacks from Sikkim on Nepal's eastern border should the Gorkhas choose to invade Tibet in order to force the issue of Himalayan trade. The Sikkimese government was probably aware of Nepal's aspirations regarding trade, as they had suffered a number of losses prior to the treaty of 1775 to Nepal in its western regions bordering on Tibet; and it is by no coincidence that in the same year as the opening of the Sikkimese - Tibetan trade route, the Chos rgyal issued documents

¹² Pradhan: 1991: 130 – 31.

relating to lands already held as a means of reinforcing traditional internal alliances.

In 1788, Nepal invaded Sikkim and it is said in the *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* that the Sikkimese government was taken by surprise by the Gorkha invasion.¹³ However, Nepal had been encroaching on Sikkimese territory, despite the peace treaty of 1775, and perhaps the surprise documented in *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* refers rather to the speed of the Nepalese invasion and the total defeat of Sikkim by the two-pronged offensive from Bijaypur and the Darjeeling district.¹⁴ As a result of this invasion the Chos rgyal fled towards the Bhutanese border and was given financial aid from the Bhutanese. What happened to this aid is uncertain. However, according to YA8, Tshangs rin 'dzin carried on the fight against the Gorkhas and managed to make a number of successful punitive attacks on the Nepalese. YA8 lines 12 – 13 reads thus:¹⁵

When in the times of the sde pa Tshangs rin 'dzin in the sa prel year [1788] Gorkha troops attacked and in the times when the troops of the lho po and Lepcha departed against the enemies of the [Buddhist] teachings, the brother Brag dkar sde pa Tshangs rin 'dzin departed first as the military leader. [And] after[wards] he forced the Gorkha troops back over rNam rtse, Chong thang and Sing la...

However, after Tshangs rin 'dzin death in battle in 1788 the Sikkimese forces, at least according to *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* and YA8, were severely weakened and eventually collapsed.¹⁶ The events after this point become muddled in the chaotic aftermath of the Tibetan – Gorkha war of the 1790s. As noted above, the invasion of Sikkim was a tactical manoeuvre on the part of the Gorkhas to defuse a possible attack from Sikkim after the invasion of Tibet. However, what is uncertain is the extent of Gorkha control over Sikkimese territory after the 1792 war between Tibet, China and Nepal.

Most of the secondary literature seems divided on the actual geographical distinctions between Nepalese controlled Sikkim and the areas under the authority of the Sikkimese chos rgyals. F.I.S. Tucker, for example, states that the six thousand troops that were dispatched to

¹³ Ye shes sgrol ma: 1908: 48 (Eng. Version).

¹⁴ *Ibid.* and Pradhan: 1991: 132.

¹⁵ YA8. Square brackets are the authors.

¹⁶ Ye shes sgrol ma: 1908: 48 and YA8.

Sikkim in 1788 overran most of the Sikkimese territory in the Terai and the hills but were unable to penetrate the territory surrounding modern Gangtok.¹⁷ B.J. Hasrat, however, seems confused in regard to the limits of Nepalese conquest as he states that the Gorkhas possessed most of Sikkim but the area of Nag po ri¹⁸ (presumably this refers to Nag ri – which equates roughly with the modern Indian administrative district of Darjeeling)¹⁹ was held jointly by Sikkim and Nepal. This seems to be mistaken as this particular region remained under direct Nepalese control until the end of the Anglo-Gorkha war and the signing of the treaty of Sugauli in 1815. L.F. Stiller on the other hand shows the eastern border of Nepal as following the Raman River until its confluence with the Tista (the territory to the east of the Tista was under the administration of Bhutan).²⁰ The map in Bajracharya's book entitled *Bahadur Shah: the Regent of Nepal*, shows that Nepal had possession of all of Sikkim's territory in the Terai south of the Raman River, west of the Tista and east of the Mechi River.²¹

While it has been established that the Nepalese had control of the Sikkimese capital of Rabdentse in 1788, what is not known is for how long they occupied this territory to the west of the Tista and in the hills. The *Bras ljongs rgyal rabs* sheds no light on this issue, being mainly concerned with lamenting the injustice of the Nepalese invasion. Having said that, there is one clue to be found in document YA8 and that is the place where the document was written and some of the contents. The final sentence of this document reads thus: '*lugs gnyis kyi gdan sa chen po pho brang rab brtan rtse nas me 'brug dbo zla'i yar tshes dge bar bris*' (This was virtuously written in the time of the middle of the second month of the fire dragon year from the great place of the dual system [of religion and politics] the palace of Rabdentse). While it could be the case that this reference to Rabdentse is nothing more than a wish of the government to maintain continuity with territory lost during the Nepalese invasion, it appears not to be so. A more detailed examination of the Tibetan documents, especially document YA8 clarifies the extent of Nepalese control in the western Sikkimese hills. 'So it happened that the region beyond [to the south of] Sing la [an area close to the modern boundary of West Sikkim and

¹⁷ F. Tucker: 1957: 57.

¹⁸ B. J. Hasrat: 1971: 268.

¹⁹ Regmi: 1975: 55.

²⁰ L. F. Stiller: 1973: Inserted map back cover.

²¹ Bajracharya: 1992: 1.

West Bengal] slipped into the hands of others'²² [i.e. the Nepalese]. The territory referred to here includes the district of modern Darjeeling and the land of the Sikkimese Terai extending eastwards to the Tista and south beyond Siliguri.

The document continues in an apologetic way, for this land had been a part of the endowments the ancestors of the Brag dkar pa family had been given by the Sikkimese state in the time of Ka rma dar rgyas. It further states that the government had sent a petition to the Tibetan government and the Ambans in Lhasa relating to this lost territory and that the Tibetan government had responded by granting the family the tax revenues of Phag ri rdzong in the Chumbi valley. The granting of these gifts is also alluded to in document YA1 of the Brag dkar pa collection, which is a document from the financial/revenue office of the Kashag and carries the black seal associated with that office.²³

From lines 22-24 of YA8 the areas of land which remained in the ownership of the Brag dkar pa family are listed and included in this list is the area of g.Yang sgang which relates to the modern estate of g.Yang thang rdzong,²⁴ the residential lands of the Brag dkar pa family in West Sikkim. This seems to suggest that the region permanently acquired by the Nepalese after the invasion of Sikkim was the Terai up to where the Raman meets the Tista and then following the Tista southwards to the plains. What is still ambiguous, however, is the duration that the areas of West Sikkim, including the palace of Rab brtan rtse, were held by the Nepalese after the invasion in 1788.

While this document perhaps provides some interesting information on the extent of Nepalese held territory, it also gives some interesting

²² Document YA8.

²³ YA1 is reproduced here in full: *rtsis khang nas / mchod yon gong ma'i bka' shogs dgongs 'brel 'di ga nas 'go mchan song don bzhin / 'bras ljongs blon brag sha nas sa mchams dang dmag don gyi zhabs ('degs) zhus rjes gsol ras 'di lo'i 'bab 'bru ru'i khal nyi shu tham pa phag ri ljong sdod sbrel po'i lho'i pa'i sho nas sprad pas rtsis 'gro sngar lam bzhin yong ba gyis, shing [lchags] bya zla ches la /*

²⁴ g.Yang sgang at first inspection seems to indicate a precious mountain ridge or spur. Whereas in the meaning of the place name: g.Yang thang, the mountain spur (sgang) becomes plain (thang) thus forming the combined connotation: precious plain. g.yang in this instance refers to g.yang as in g.yang sgam (g.yang grom in the Sikkimese dialect) i.e a treasure box of religious articles. It is also possible that the use of g.yang in this place name implies a gorge / ravine and in the Sikkimese dialect g.yang can mean a kind of grass used for thatching [which happens to grow locally], which could provide two likely translations: 'the plain of the gorge' or 'the plain of g.yang'. Whatever, the precise origins of this place name it seems from the text in question that the residential estate of the Brag dkar pa family had previously been called g.Yang sgang.

details about the nature of the internal alliance between the Chos rgyal and the Brag dkar pa minister. Contained within the later sections of YA8, are a number of references to the loyalty of the family throughout history, the association of the Brag dkar pa family with the family of the Chos rgyal and commands to those under the administration of Sikkim, whether of high or low status, to obey and respect the old Brag dkar pa minister. While it may be argued that this is only a literary convention and thus have no significant meaning, it seems that this is not the case here. Not only had a member of the Brag dkar pa family given his life in the protection of the country but he also aided the Chos rgyal in his escape to the Bhutanese border, which probably saved the life of the Chos rgyal. The government thus seems to be genuinely grateful for such acts and apologetic at the loss of territory under the control of the Brag dkar pa family.

Moreover, this document serves to re-establish the alliance between the government and rdzong dpon after what had been a 'make or break' period in Sikkimese politics. It also signals a return to the status quo, an offering of thanks to this family for their efforts and loyalty and recognition of Tshangs rig 'dzin death during the conflict.

Conclusion

The eighteenth century was undoubtedly a turbulent time in Sikkimese history: not only was Sikkim facing external threats, but also internal ones resulting from its relative youth as a state. Given this political context, it became increasingly important for the government to establish and maintain both internal alliances with powerful individuals and possible opponents, as well as external links with the Tibetan authorities. The documents relating to the Brag dkar pa family referred to here provide us with one example of such political relationships. In addition, they also highlight the complex issues involved in the formation and maintenance of alliances such as that with the Brag dkar pa family in Sikkim. Ka rma dar rgyas, as an official of the Tibetan government (although of a low level) sent to take control of the military and administrative apparatus of Sikkim, could have become a threat to the Sikkimese government. However, by bestowing an estate on his family and legitimizing this gift by sending a Sikkimese official to Tibet in return, the Sikkimese not only managed to neutralize a potential political opponent but also managed to establish an alliance with a powerful individual. Furthermore, after the time of Ka rma dar

rgyas and the continued residence of his family in Sikkim, this earlier grant of land also serves as an emotional bond, based on the recognition that the position of the Brag dkar pa family in Sikkim resulted from this political alliance with the Chos rgyal.

It is perhaps this emotional bond that document YA4 alludes to by the simple re-stating of the history of the family's acquisition of land. Also, the granting of land, which after all is the means for economic sustainability, gives such an alliance a physical quality. Clearly status is not only achieved through family histories but also through bonds of political and economic association between the state and the individual. Thus the political position and the general status of the Brag dkar pa family became inter-connected with the fortunes or misfortunes of the Sikkimese state. It is perhaps these economic, social, political and emotional bonds that YA4 is intending to exploit in order to guarantee the participation and support for the state in times of political instability.

So in conclusion, these documents help to give us an idea of the way in which, alliances are constructed and maintained, as well as providing clues to the way in which the internal political mechanisms of the Sikkimese state operated. The example of the relationships between the Brag dkar pa family and the state, may be used to assist our understanding of internal alliances in Sikkim in the wider context.

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CONSTRUCTING SIKKIMESE NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE 1960s AND 1970s

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A generation has elapsed since Sikkim was annexed by India. Yet symbolic remnants from its former life as a semi-independent Buddhist kingdom linger: the election system reserves twelve seats for the minority Bhutia-Lepcha community; the Sikkim national flag decorates the rear windows of vehicles plying the steep streets of Gangtok;¹ and the towering, five-peaked Mount Kangchendzönga still stirs the hearts of Sikkimese from government bureaucrats in the capital to cardamom cultivators in remote hamlets. These legacies hark back to the 1960s and 1970s when the last Chogyal, or king of Sikkim, Palden Thondup Namgyal (1923-1981), and others led domestic efforts to create and shape a national identity for the kingdom, namely, an identity embraced by the multi-ethnic people of Sikkim and accepted as the foundation for a collective interest. Concurrently, the Chogyal strove to carve out a distinct international identity for Sikkim, specifically, a political presence on the world stage clarifying his country's status as an independent entity that enjoyed special treaty relations with India.

In their seminal texts on the creation of nationalism, Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson argue that national identity is "invented" or "constructed."² The process, usually directed by the educated elite, serves to advance the interests of the nation and encourage allegiance to it. This perspective is the lens through which I shall examine Sikkimese efforts in the 1960s and early 1970s to craft and promote a distinct identity. There are many forms and purposes of identity construction, but this article will focus on the political and cultural components of domestic and international identity formation in Sikkim, and mainly considers pertinent developments in the capital Gangtok, the administrative and political centre of Sikkim and the

¹ Up until at least the spring of 1999, the national flag of Sikkim fluttered over the Palace in Gangtok.

² See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

district with the largest concentration of educated Sikkimese. The drive to create a distinct, recognized identity for Sikkim, I argue, was spurred by the intersection of two forces, the era of decolonization and the personality and experiences of Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal. It was shaped by two overarching challenges: 1) forging a shared identity out of a multi-ethnic society, and 2) convincing the world community of the separate political identity of Sikkim.

In this article I suggest that the seeds of an articulated national consciousness took root in Sikkim due to the efforts of the last Chogyal and others. Yet the terrain upon which the seeds were sown has radically shifted. An examination of the experiment of the 1960s and early 1970s together with a recognition of the changed political circumstances in Sikkim, point to timely questions: how might the Sikkimese people continue to imagine and assert their unique identity within the framework of the Indian union? And, more generally, how might a stateless people keep alive and flourishing their distinct character when they are a minority in a large nation-state?

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The early history of Sikkim reads like waves of bloody attacks from the east and west.³ Bhutan and Nepal plundered hamlets and the capital, and seized chunks of Sikkimese territory, altering its borders forever. It was the East India Company that, in 1817, with the Treaty of Titalya, put an end to the devastating raids. Through this treaty the British government gained a permanent foothold in Sikkim. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the three Himalayan kingdoms came to function as a buffer zone for the British Raj, a mountainous bulwark protecting India from the Chinese and Russian empires. In an arrangement that suited British India, the exact terms of its relationships with the three states were never completely spelled out.⁴ Sikkim was destined, however, to emerge as the lynchpin for British aspirations to “open” Tibet and so was brought more closely into the political orbit of the British colonial system than either Nepal or Bhutan.

Sikkim possesses what has been described as the “single most strategically important piece of real estate in the entire Himalayan

³ Incursions from Bhutan began in 1700, and the first clash between the Namgyal and Shah (Nepal) dynasties occurred in 1778.

⁴ Leo E. Rose, “India and Sikkim: Redefining the Relationship,” *Pacific Affairs*, vol. XLII, no. 1 (Spring 1969): 32.

range.”⁵ Sikkim’s Natu La and Jelep La, two 14,000-foot-plus passes descending into Tibet’s Chumbi Valley, provide one of the easiest passage through the vertical reaches of the Himalayas and have invested Sikkim with a geopolitical importance disproportionate to its tiny size. In the late 1800s as the British became involved in the “Great Game” with Russia and increasingly keen to expand commercial interests north of the Himalayas, Sikkim was transformed into a protectorate of British India. The Anglo-Chinese Treaty of 1890 gave the British government exclusive control over the internal administration and foreign relations of the kingdom.⁶ For almost twenty years, the British directly administered Sikkim and in 1908 restored the internal administration to its ruler. The exact political standing of Sikkim remained ambiguous; that is, “Sikkim was never a feudatory ‘Native State’...but neither was it independent or entirely autonomous.”⁷ Two things, however, were clear: Sikkim was more limited in its internal and external affairs than either Bhutan or Nepal; and the ambiguity surrounding the political status of Sikkim would plague the kingdom in later years. In 1947 the British left India. Democratic India would play a large role in the future of the three monarchies.

A few years later, Bhutan, Nepal, and Sikkim negotiated treaties with the government of India that mirrored historical relationships with British India and were tinged with India’s anxiety over China’s ancient claims to India’s northern frontier. Because the Indo-Bhutan Treaty was signed in 1949 just prior to the Chinese invasion of Tibet, Bhutan secured very favourable terms: India recognized Bhutan’s fundamental independence and guaranteed not to interfere in its internal affairs; Bhutan agreed to be “guided by the advice of the GOI [Government of India] in its external relations.”⁸ Nepal had remained the most independent of the three Himalayan states during imperial rule in India. Yet, even its 1950 treaty reflected India’s security concerns in the

⁵ John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), p. 167.

⁶ Formal relations between British India and Sikkim began with the Treaty of Titalya in 1817 after the conclusion of the Anglo-Gurkha War (1814-1816). The Tumlong Treaty of 1861 allowed the British government to intervene in the internal affairs of Sikkim but left the ruler of the kingdom sovereign.

⁷ Rose, p. 32.

⁸ Amar Kaur Jasbir Singh, *Himalayan Triangle: A Historical Survey of British India’s Relations with Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan 1765-1950* (London: British Library, 1988), pp. 369-70. In the early 1960s India assumed responsibility for Bhutan’s defence “by implication.”

northern reaches of the subcontinent; in effect, India retained de facto control of Nepal's defence and external relations. The Indo-Sikkim Treaty of 1950 was the most restrictive of the three treaties: Sikkim remained a protectorate of democratic India with responsibility for its internal affairs; India looked after its defence, foreign relations, and communications. A three-page letter, sent by the Political Officer to the Palace and commonly known as the 'Exchange of Letters,' further defined the relationship and stated that the government of India could intervene in the internal administration of Sikkim "should a situation arise in which law and order are seriously threatened within the State."⁹

Palden Thondup Namgyal, in his early twenties and crown prince at the time, negotiated the terms of Sikkim's treaty with India. As the second son of Chogyal Tashi Namgyal (1893-1964), he was expected to live in the shadow of his older brother, Paljor Namgyal, and make his mark in the realm of religion. Because he was the incarnation of two eminent Buddhist figures, Palden Thondup Namgyal received monastic training in Tibet. In 1933 he was installed as the head of two important monasteries in Sikkim. Besides his religious education in Tibet and Sikkim, he attended school at St Joseph's Convent in Kalimpong, St Joseph's College in Darjeeling, and Simla's Bishop Cotton School. He also spoke five languages, including English, fluently. His plans to study science at Cambridge were dashed when his brother, a member of the Royal Air Force, was killed in a plane crash in 1941. Suddenly, Palden Thondup Namgyal found himself at the helm of the kingdom.¹⁰

Due to the changed circumstances, Namgyal attended the Indian Civil Service training camp in Dehra Dun. In 1963 he married an American, a recent graduate of Sarah Lawrence College named Hope Cooke. (His first wife, a Tibetan aristocrat, died in childbirth along with their fourth child.) By the time Palden Thondup Namgyal was consecrated as the twelfth Chogyal of Sikkim in 1965, he had served as his father's principal adviser for over twenty years, had traveled more than any of his predecessors,¹¹ was an honorary Lieutenant-Colonel in the Indian Army, and was president of the Mahabodhi Society of India,

⁹ "Exchange of Letters," February 25, 1951. "See Sunanda Datta-Ray, *Smash and Grab: Annexation of Sikkim* (Delhi: Vikas, 1984), p. 61, and L.B. Basnet, *Sikkim: A Short Political History* (Delhi: Chand, 1974), p. 96.

¹⁰ His father, Sir Tashi Namgyal, more inclined to religious and artistic matters than *realpolitik*, had virtually retired from active participation in the administration of the kingdom.

¹¹ Except perhaps for his uncle, Sidkeong Tulku, the tenth Chogyal.

an international Buddhist organization. Namgyal lived these formative years against the backdrop of decolonization, in the era when many non-self-governing territories were gaining independence from their colonizing powers. By the early 1960s, he and others in Sikkim, believing that most terms of the Indo-Sikkim Treaty—Namgyal never advocated exclusive Sikkimese control of defence¹²—had outlived their purpose. It was within this context, in the period that Anderson calls “the last wave of nationalism,” that the quest for a Sikkimese national identity was launched.¹³

FORGING A SHARED IDENTITY

Sikkim evolved into a Buddhist monarchy in which a religious king, or Chogyal, and minority Bhutia people dominated a population overwhelmingly Nepali by ancestry, and Hindu by religion. Beginning in the 1860s and continuing over several decades, the British with Sikkimese collaborators settled many Nepalis in the sparsely populated southern and western tracts of Sikkim. This policy was driven by the British desire to balance the pro-Tibetan Bhutias, or Sikkimese of Tibetan descent, with pro-British-India Nepalis.¹⁴ By 1891, according to the census, “Nepali Sikkimese” outnumbered the earliest Sikkimese subjects—the Lepchas, considered the first inhabitants of Sikkim, and the Bhutias,¹⁵ or settlers from Tibet who founded the kingdom of Sikkim in the mid-seventeenth century.¹⁶ Yet, in spite of ethnic and

¹² Because of Sikkim’s vulnerable location, India was particularly concerned about defence issues in the kingdom. Concerns intensified after 1959 when China tightened its control over Tibet, and during the Himalayan border wars that began in 1962 and continued as skirmishes into the late 1960s.

¹³ See, Anderson, chapter 7, “The Last Wave.”

¹⁴ Despite protests from the Chogyal and the powerful Bhutia-Lepcha landlords, this wide scale migration continued virtually unchecked until the last part of the nineteenth century.

¹⁵ Tibetan and Bhutanese migration to the area which became what we now know as Sikkim began in the thirteenth century. In this article I use the term “Bhutia” to refer to Sikkimese of Tibetan and Bhutanese descent.

¹⁶ The earliest inhabitants of Sikkim also included Limbus and Magars, sometimes referred to as “Tsong” in Sikkim. There are claims that these two Mongolian ethnic groups originally hail from Tibet. For example, *History of Sikkim* states that the Tsong “revered the Matog Lama as their Guru, followed him from Tsang [Tibet] and settled with him in Sikkim,” Sir Thuthob Namgyal and Yeshe Dolma, *History of Sikkim* (Unpublished typescript, 1908), p. 21. Their exact origins, however, have not been authoritatively established. For electoral purposes, they are usually lumped together with the Nepali Sikkimese.

religious differences, there was a cohesion among Sikkimese subjects that anchored them to the mountains, river valleys, and rice paddies of the kingdom.

Anderson argues that the foundations of modern nationalism, or national identity, are embedded in cultural systems, such as dynasty or religious structures.¹⁷ Sikkim is no exception. Before Indian independence, one could argue that most Sikkimese, no matter what their background, were commonly attached to Sikkim as homeland through two phenomena: 1) a deep reverence for their Buddhist ruler and 2) veneration of Mount Kangchendzönga or the guardian deity said to reside within the mountain. Although many Nepali Sikkimese practiced Hinduism, they felt a strong allegiance to the Chogyal because of the ingrained Nepalese tradition of honoring their ruler, who in Nepal is an incarnation of Vishnu.¹⁸ And rock-solid Mount Kangchendzönga, visible from every district in Sikkim, was a constant reminder of a shared landscape, if not shared traditions¹⁹. For the Chogyal, the daunting task of the 1960s and 1970s was to tap into those common attachments and expand upon them in ways that acknowledged the demographic shift within Sikkim and protected the traditional prerogatives of the Bhutia-Lepchas.

Cultural efforts: "Tibeto-Burman" trend and textbooks

In the summer of 1967, two Sikkimese women, Gayatri Devi Gurung and Chum Dorji Wongmu, traveled to Manila, where they represented the Sikkim Social Welfare Society, a nonpolitical but official organization, at a conference on women's leadership organized by the

¹⁷ Anderson writes, "What I am proposing is that nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being," p. 12.

¹⁸ Chandra Das Rai, retired from government service since 1983, was one of several Nepali Sikkimese interviewed who confirmed this. Interview, Gangtok, April 24, 2001. It should be mentioned that some wealthy Nepali Sikkimese, mostly Pradhans, or members of the Newar community, owned land in both Nepal and Sikkim, which left them vulnerable to accusations of divided loyalties.

¹⁹ See Anna Balikci-Denjonpaga, "Kangchendzönga: secular and Buddhist perceptions of the mountain deity of Sikkim among the Lhopos," *Bulletin of Tibetology* 38 (2) November 2002. She writes, 'Dzö-nga played an important role as a national symbol and it is said that all ethnic communities, whatever their origins and whether Hindu or Buddhist, used to recognise and worship Kangchendzönga if they considered themselves first and foremost as Sikkimese,' p. 2.

Associated Country Women of the World. In addition to participating in a seminar, the two women displayed a collection of items (or representations) from Sikkim including: a mask of Kangchendzönga, the Sikkimese national flag, a “lucky sign” *thangka* (religious painting), a yak, a mule, *somba* (boots), a cup and saucer, *thongba* (wooden mug for the local beer), *mani* (Buddhist rosary), booklets about Sikkimese history and society, postcards of Buddhist sages, birds of Sikkim, and skins of wild animals. The women also exhibited color slides showing the Chogyal, the Gyalmo (queen), and other members of the royal family; the diverse flora, fauna, and unusual natural environment of Sikkim; and folk dances and rituals.²⁰

A consideration of the collection is illuminating. The items as symbols evoke the agrarian rhythms of Sikkimese society. They point to the profound influence of Buddhism and the distinctive role of landscape and nature in Sikkimese life. Finally, they underscore the centrality of the Namgyal dynasty, and Kangchendzönga, both as physical landmark and paramount deity in Sikkimese Buddhism. The exhibit demonstrates a self-conscious effort to single out objects that offered crystallized and idealized versions of what it meant to be Sikkimese in the late 1960s. As a whole, it reflects a constructed image of Sikkimese identity. For our purposes, it is useful to bear in mind that “images are not only self-projections, but also tools of self-creation.”²¹ The collection perhaps reflects the Bhutia bias of the group’s advisor, the Chogyal’s sister, Princess Pema Choden Yapshi Phunkhang. Yet, in a somewhat exaggerated way, it also mirrors a cultural trend noticeable from at least the early 1960s.

Hobsbawm describes “invented traditions” as “practices normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.” Invented traditions often refer to a historic past, but their continuity with it is “largely fictitious.”²² Hobsbawm’s concept was at play in the shaping of Sikkimese national identity during the 1960s. In the book *Nations of Asia* (1966), the Chogyal remarked that although two-thirds of the Sikkimese population speak Nepali, “[m]any in this group are

²⁰ *Sikkim Herald*, vol. 8, no. 41, July 28, 1967.

²¹ Bhikku Parekh, “Defining National Identity in a Multicultural Society” in *People, Nation, and State: The Meaning of Ethnicity and Nationalism*, ed. Edward Mortimer (London: I.B. Taurus & Co, Ltd, 1999), p. 67.

²² Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 1-2. He also notes that “[w]here the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived nor invented,” p. 7.

not ethnically Nepali but are of Mongoloid stock.”²³ The suggestion was that most Nepali Sikkimese are not Indo-Aryan but, rather, culturally Buddhist with ancestral links to “Mongolian” tribes: Gurung, Rai, Tamang, Newar, Limbu, and Magar, or mountain peoples, some of whom, generations back, had migrated from the Tibetan plateau to Nepal, and their ancestors, finally to Sikkim.²⁴ Although many members of these tribes no longer spoke Tibetan (or a Tibeto-Burman dialect), or observed the customs of their forebears, the potential to draw upon what was perceived as the basic kinship of the tribes—one that dovetailed with Bhutia history and culture—provided inspiration for the construction of national identity.

This idea gained some traction in Gangtok. Around the time of the coronation of Palden Thondup Namgyal in 1965, the term “Tibeto-Burman” became popular in the capital, particularly among a sizable group of educated elite—Anderson’s “intelligentsia”²⁵—mostly younger, educated bureaucrats who shared the Chogyal’s vision of greater autonomy for Sikkim. This group of mostly government bureaucrats hailed from different tribal and socioeconomic backgrounds, embraced the notion of a Tibeto-Burman identity for Sikkim, and adopted Tibeto-Burman trappings, a blend of Tibetan-inspired clothing, food, music, and handicrafts.²⁶ While obviously a linguistic term,²⁷ Tibeto-Burman “was understood to be a vague supratribal category that more or less embraced all the tribes in Sikkim

²³ Donald Wilber, ed., *Nations of Asia* (New York: Hart Publishing., 1966), pp. 478-79. This reference appears in Leo Rose, “Modern Sikkim in an Historical Perspective” in *Reflections on Tibetan Culture*, eds Lawrence Epstein et al (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), p. 71.

²⁴ These groups are often referred to as “matwali” castes, or alcohol-drinkers. As if to echo the Chogyal, M.M. Rasaily, a retired, senior-level bureaucrat and close adviser to the Chogyal, told me: “Sikkimese people are different; they are of Mongoloid background. We are more akin to Tibetans,” interview, Gangtok, March 28, 2001. Princess Bhuvnesh Kumari Patiala, the Chogyal’s legal adviser from 1974, told me, “Not all Nepali Sikkimese were Nepalese proper. They come from the tribes of the Himalayan belt,” interview, December 7, 1998. Again, the subtext here is that many Nepali Sikkimese are culturally Buddhist.

²⁵ See Anderson, pp. 116-139, for a discussion of the role of the intelligentsia in the rise of nationalism in colonial territories.

²⁶ It should be noted that Sikkimese subjects were never required to wear certain clothes, speak a particular language, or practice foreign customs.

²⁷ Paradoxically, since most Nepali Sikkimese—and increasingly more Bhutia-Lepchas—could not speak Tibetan (or the Sikkimese dialect of Tibetan, Denjongke), Nepali was in essence the *lingua franca* of Sikkim.

and meant ‘Not Indian.’”²⁸ Supporters of this theory believed that if only Nepali Sikkimese with Mongolian roots could hark back to their ancient origins and claim them with pride, they would discover their affinity with the Bhutias and Lepchas.²⁹ In this way, a united Sikkim could be forged and withstand Indian hegemony. While such notions may appear naïve or even restrictive,³⁰ they seemed to be sincere, and some people in Gangtok at least, acted upon them. The Chogyal’s comment cited above suggests his implicit, if not explicit, support of these efforts.

*Education*³¹

As Anderson points out, the educational system of a nation is often used to promote a shared history, culture, and language among its youth.³² The quest for a national identity in Sikkim led to a review and transformation of primary education. Prior to 1967 no coherent program or policy for grades kindergarten through eight existed in

²⁸ Hope Cooke, *Time Change: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980), p. 130. Cooke writes that most Gangtokers were unsure of the precise meaning of “Tibeto-Burman.”

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30.

³⁰ Many critics have argued that forging a common identity in Sikkim was unattainable, or that it was not desired by the Chogyal. For example, the anthropologist T.B. Subba writes, “The Buddhist theocratic and hereditary rulers there [in Sikkim] did not allow such groups to come together nor did they recognise the cultural, linguistic, and religious heterogeneity within the so-called Nepalis. To them, such communities were basically ‘migrants’ from Nepal, Hindu by religion and ‘troublesome as neighbours’” (Subba, *The Politics of Culture: A Study of Three Kirata Communities in the Eastern Himalayas* [Chennai: Orient Longman, 1999], p. 2). Former dewan Nari Rustomji writes that the differences between the Nepali Sikkimese and the Bhutias and Lepchas, most significantly the “rigidities of the caste system,” were substantial, implying that finding a common identity would have been next to impossible. See Rustomji, *Sikkim: A Himalayan Tragedy* New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1987, p. 16. Leo Rose writes of the large Nepali Sikkimese population as “essentially indigestible” and presenting “a persistent political crisis.” See Rose, “Modern Sikkim,” p. 70.

³¹ This section is based on discussions with Sikkimese involved in educational efforts during this time, including Santosh Kumar Bardewa, who wrote the Nepali textbooks; and a paper, “Development of Curriculum and Textbooks Grades Kindergarten – VIII in Sikkim 1967-1973,” by Hope Cooke Namgyal, Columbia University Teachers College, 1977. Namgyal was the chairman of the textbook and curriculum committee.

³² Anderson, pp. 113-14.

Sikkim.³³ Education hinged on rote learning and memorization; textbooks, when available, came from India and did not contain any Sikkim-specific material. In 1967 a “textbook and curriculum committee” was established; its goals were to “define and develop educational goals and curriculum” for grades K-8 and to make education “more suitable to the special conditions and character of Sikkim.” Over the next five years, in addition to extensive teacher training, textbooks were produced for social studies (including books on community studies, Sikkimese history, geography, and nature studies 1-8), English (readers based on Sikkimese folks tales and literature 1-8), and the three mother tongue languages (primers 1-3 and readers 1-8).

In Sikkim the complicated issue of language posed challenges for the educational system. English was the official language in this small country where people spoke three distinct languages—Denjongke (a Sikkimese dialect of Tibetan), Lepcha, and Nepali—but in fact, Nepali was the unofficial lingua franca. In grades 1-3, children were to be instructed in their mother tongue, with English taught as a second language, but in reality, this was rarely the case as most schools were understaffed. For reasons too detailed to go into here, English was the medium of instruction in schools after third grade. Since English continued to be used for most of the grades even after the review, the committee amplified efforts to make the content of what the children studied “more relevant, more Sikkimese.” The committee developed an archive of Sikkimese material for the textbooks through the efforts of teams of high school students. Armed with tape recorders, the volunteers fanned out across the most remote reaches of the kingdom to collect Sikkimese myths, folk tales, and music from every possible ethno-linguistic group, which were then translated into the three national languages of Sikkim. In this way, “all the children, although studying different languages would absorb a shared frame of reference on their national culture.”³⁴

³³ In 1960, 9,700 students were enrolled in 117 lower primary schools (grades 1-3), 47 upper primary schools (grades 4-5), 13 middle schools (grades 6-8), and 5 high schools. By 1975, 20,959 students were enrolled in 52 lower primary, 176 upper primary schools, 29 junior high schools, and seven higher/senior secondary schools. Amal Datta, *Sikkim Since Independence: A Study of Impact of Education and Emerging Class Structure* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1991), p. 41, 50.

³⁴ The social studies series for early grades was titled “Tashi, Mohan, and Kipu,” which are common first names in the three main ethnic groups of Sikkim. The series was illustrated with professional photographs of three Sikkimese children, as the series namesake, acting out daily life in Sikkim.

Political efforts: parity and citizenship

While there may have been sincere, if visionary efforts, in Gangtok to build a shared Sikkimese identity, the complicated electoral system in Sikkim heightened the basic differences between the two main communities. Established under the “guidance” of the government of India and initiated with the election of the first Sikkim Council in 1953, the election system divided the electorate into Bhutia-Lepcha and Nepali Sikkimese constituencies, reserved seats in the Sikkim Council for these communities, and required a weighted voting system for the reserved seats. Each community received equal representation in the elected government—even though the Bhutia-Lepchas now only comprised less than thirty percent of the population. To win a seat, the candidate had to secure the most votes from his own community and in addition, at least fifteen percent of votes from the other community. Eventually, parity through seat distribution was extended to the entire administration. The two communities were represented equally in the Sikkim Council, the State Cabinet, and in secretary posts of the state government.³⁵

The introduction of the electoral system in 1953 obligated the Chogyal and his advisers to begin the process of defining Sikkimese citizenship for the first time.³⁶ It would take eight years and several drafts before they produced a “Sikkim Subjects Regulation” mutually agreeable to the Palace and the main political parties. Once a person’s name made the Register of Sikkim Subjects, the person was regarded as Sikkimese³⁷ and guaranteed legal rights, such as voting. Although there was vigorous debate over elements in the draft considered hostile to the Nepali Sikkimese, a compromise was reached, and eventually the Regulation was deemed acceptable.³⁸

³⁵ Jigme N. Kazi, *Inside Sikkim: Against the Tide* (Gangtok: Hill Media Publications, 1993), p. 222.

³⁶ According to Leo Rose, the failure to do this earlier may have been due in part to Sikkim’s status as protectorate of the British and, later, Indian governments. Rose, unpublished manuscript, p. 97.

³⁷ *The Sikkim Subjects Regulation*, July 3, 1961, p. 7. The three categories defined by the regulation were: 1) persons living in Sikkim since 1946; 2) persons not domiciled in Sikkim but of Lepcha, Bhutia, or Tsong origin whose father or grandfather was born in Sikkim; 3) persons not domiciled in Sikkim but whose ancestors were deemed to be Sikkimese subjects before 1850.

³⁸ Leo Rose, unpublished manuscript, p. 172.

As all communities in Sikkim eventually consented to the criteria for citizenship, they, too, agreed in essence to the parity system.³⁹ Parity was justified on the principle that it would be unfair to deny the Bhutia-Lepcha minority, the earliest inhabitants of Sikkim, at least equal status with the more recent immigrant groups. Some sources close to the Chogyal believe that he viewed the parity system as an interim solution, that once all Sikkimese recognized their common destiny and saw themselves first as Sikkimese, the need for parity would dissolve.⁴⁰ But that would take time—and some safeguards to protect against the submersion of Bhutia-Lepcha interests by the majority Nepali Sikkimese. Others contend that parity was a deliberate strategy “manufactured to protect the interests of the minority” indefinitely and that it emphasized and widened the divisions between the two main communities.⁴¹ One thing is definite: the system itself became a valid point of contention and ultimately undercut efforts at creating a common identity.

The principle of parity was also applied to situations outside of politics. The choice of delegates attending the Manila conference of 1967 is an example. Gayatri Devi Gurung and Chum Dorji Wongmu respectively hailed from the Nepali Sikkimese and the Bhutia-Lepcha communities. In other domains, such as education, employment, and cultural life, an unofficial policy of equal representation was generally followed. For instance, the Tashi Namgyal Academy in Gangtok, a public high school for boys, offered three scholarships for Bhutia-Lepcha boys and three for “Sikkimese students of Nepali origin.”⁴²

THE QUEST FOR INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

Interlinked with the construction and promotion of a Sikkimese national identity were efforts to cultivate and garner worldwide

³⁹ The three main political parties in Sikkim agreed with the fundamentals of the system, although in varying degrees.

⁴⁰ See Cooke, p. 127.

⁴¹ C.D. Rai expressed the sentiments of several Nepali Sikkimese I interviewed: “What did our administration do to perpetuate the communal angle? They divided the seats between the Bhutia-Lepchas and the Nepali Sikkimese. Once divisions were created, they remained... We were constantly reminded that we were Nepali—and not Bhutia-Lepcha. In order to create a unified Sikkim, you have to wipe out all these divisions, but our government devised means to keep us divided. It was a strategy,” interview, April 10, 2001.

⁴² *Sikkim Herald*, vol. 9, no. 59, May 1, 1968.

awareness of Sikkim's distinct political identity. In Sikkim the spectrum of meanings for "distinct political identity" ranged from more autonomy in internal affairs and foreign relations at one end, to complete independence from India at the other end.⁴³ In some circles there was talk of Sikkim achieving a political status like Bhutan (which lobbied for and finally gained a seat in the United Nations in 1971), if not Nepal. No matter where politicians, civil servants, well-educated citizens, and Palace officials positioned themselves on that spectrum, the Indo-Sikkim Treaty came to be viewed, in the words of Sikkimese politician and writer Lal Bahadur Basnet, as the "fetters that bound Sikkim."⁴⁴ While it is true that signing the treaty had affirmed Sikkim's identity and a degree of international personality, many Sikkimese now believed that treaty revision was essential: it would protect Sikkim from Indian hegemony and amplify its international personality in the mind's eye of the world community. In certain circles, constitutional comparisons between Sikkim and the "princely states" of India still lingered. The Chogyal and others wished to invalidate those associations—and the notion that India could absorb Sikkim whenever it chose.⁴⁵

Momentum for treaty revision grew in the early 1960s and intensified after the coronation of the Chogyal in 1965. A "study forum" of younger senior government bureaucrats, a large subset of the "intelligentsia" referred to earlier, was formed ostensibly to facilitate distribution of development funds from India to Sikkim. The study forum was also used as a venue to informally vet issues of treaty

⁴³ Extreme demands for treaty revision often appeared as editorials in the patriotic fortnightly newspaper, *Sikkim*. Its editor, Kaiser Bahadur Thapa, was an ardent nationalist: "Revision of the 1950 treaty there must be, and in keeping with the present-day trend, not only should our treaty be revised but it should also be registered with the United Nations Organisation. If our rights are not given to us gracefully, we are prepared to get it anyhow. But in doing so let us hope that we will not be driven in the extreme so that we are compelled to repeat the underground Naga story." *Sikkim*, Gangtok, August 6, 1968, as quoted in Datta-Ray, p. 137.

⁴⁴ L.B. Basnet, p. 143. Some Sikkimese I interviewed used revealing metaphors to describe Sikkim at this point in its national development. One informant compared Sikkim to a bird "ready to spread its wings." Another said: "What are you when you're a protectorate? ...You're a ward, and you have a guardian. After some time, the ward is going to grow up. We thought we were growing up, and the government of India thought otherwise and made us a member of their family!"

⁴⁵ Rustomji, p. 65.

revision and Sikkimese nationalism.⁴⁶ In May 1967, the Chogyal announced at a Palace press conference that his country's goal was political freedom at "the convenience of government of India" and through "mutual discussions."⁴⁷ One month later, representatives from the three main political parties in Sikkim serving as executive councillors issued a joint statement declaring that "[s]ince Sikkim signed the Treaty with India surely it is within her sovereign right to demand the revision of the Treaty as one of the signatories... . Every country has its inherent right to exist and maintain its separate identity and, therefore, to review and revise its treaty obligations in the wake of changing circumstances."⁴⁸ Although the Chogyal publicly repudiated their statement when pressured by the government of India, one year later during Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's official visit to Sikkim, he spoke of Sikkim as earning its "rightful place in the comity of nations" in his welcome address.⁴⁹

While various groups in Sikkim were pushing for treaty revision, symbols of sovereignty—the national flag and anthem, and the Sikkim Guard—were developed and integrated into state functions with the goal of projecting Sikkim's distinct identity. The national flag, a banner of white with a crimson border and a yellow eight-spoked *chakra*, or wheel of righteousness, in the center, had been in use since 1950 but became omnipresent after the coronation.⁵⁰ The Sikkim Guard, "a company-strength unit traditionally recruited from the Bhutia-Lepcha community," was expanded to a company twice the usual size, with nearly half Nepali Sikkimese.⁵¹ The national anthem of Sikkim, "Why

⁴⁶ C.D. Rai interview, April 24, 2001. The Chogyal's exact role in the study forum has been disputed. Because its members were government officials, it is reasonable to expect his implicit, if not direct, support of its activities.

⁴⁷ Datta-Ray, pp. 137-38. An article from the *Times of India* published in the *Sikkim Herald*, the official publicity organ of the Palace, quotes the ruler's thoughts on treaty revision as "...barring defence, leave the rest to us," ("Man in the News: The Chogyal of Sikkim," vol. 8, no. 60, September 14, 1967).

⁴⁸ *Sikkim Herald*, June 16, 1967, as quoted in P.R. Rao, *Sikkim: The Story of Its Integration with India* (Delhi: Cosmo, 1978), p. 25. B.B. Gurung, one of the executive councillors and now retired and serving as political advisor to the chief minister, told me, "We didn't like the word 'protectorate.' We didn't like the legacy of the British. We wanted independence to run our affairs, like Bhutan, if not Nepal," interview, March 29, 2001.

⁴⁹ *Sikkim Herald*, vol. 9, no. 61, May 7, 1968.

⁵⁰ Keshab Chandra Pradhan, interview, March 28, 2001.

⁵¹ Leo Rose, "Summary Technical Report: The Defence and Security System in Sikkim," p. 2. For an overview of the development of the Sikkim Guard in the 1960s, see Rose, "India and Sikkim: Redefining the Relations," pp. 40-42. After 1960 the

Is Denzong [Sikkim] Blooming So Fresh and Beautiful?," was set to music so that it could be played by a band of the Sikkim Guard.⁵² These symbols of sovereignty were integrated into official events. For example when Indira Gandhi visited Sikkim in May 1968, she was received on the helipad at the Palace, where the Sikkim Guard "sounded out the national anthem of India and the host country." The prime minister then inspected a guard of honour presented by the Sikkim Guards. Nine hundred alternately spaced flags of India and Sikkim lined the route of her motorcade.⁵³

There were cultural efforts, too, aimed, according to one insider, at "keeping Sikkim in the public eye."⁵⁴ The Gyalmo had succeeded in revitalizing Sikkimese handicrafts through the Palden Thondup Cottage Industries Institute. Careful attention to design, materials, and quality had resulted in Lepcha-inspired textiles, vegetable-dyed carpets, hand-made paper, clay and wood-carved masks, and Newari-like silver jewelry sold in Sikkim, India, and New York. In 1966 the Asia Society in New York established a "Sikkim Council." In 1967 a Sikkimese delegation of "Tibetologists" led by the queen mother of Sikkim travelled to Moscow, Leningrad, and Ulan Ude to examine Tibetan Buddhist collections in museums and libraries. In 1968 Sikkimese artists and citizens attended the World Craft Council meeting in Peru.⁵⁵ And in 1971 fashion events showcasing a kaleidoscope of traditional clothing worn by the many ethnic groups in Sikkim were staged at a few upscale department stores, exclusive clubs, and museums in New York City and Washington, D.C.⁵⁶ As world events tightened around Cold War politics, and Indira Gandhi's usual affection for Sikkim dried up, a certain urgency crept into these endeavors.⁵⁷

Sikkim-Tibet border was guarded by the Indian army, but a lone Sikkim Guard was posted at Natu La, one of the passes into Tibet.

⁵² Rustomji, p. 90.

⁵³ *Sikkim Herald*, vol. 9, no. 61, May 7, 1968.

⁵⁴ Cooke, *Time Change*, p. 200.

⁵⁵ Rose, "Redefining the Relationship," p. 39.

⁵⁶ Cooke, p. 200.

⁵⁷ Cooke, p. 201. She writes, "We wanted people to have Sikkim in their consciousness. If...something happened, we wouldn't be quite so alone. We knew that they wouldn't be able or willing to help, but somehow the mere fact of people knowing of us seemed to diffuse the awfulness of a potential take-over and possibly...keep it in abeyance."

A SIKKIMESE IDENTITY WITHIN THE INDIAN UNION?

In April 1973 popular demonstrations against the Chogyal led to a breakdown of law and order all over Sikkim, except in the Bhutia- and Lepcha-dominated north district⁵⁸. Several days after the collapse of his government, the Chogyal handed over the administration to the government of India. Two years later, after a surprise attack on the Sikkim Guards, a dubious “special poll,” and an act of the Indian Parliament, Sikkim became the twenty-second state of India.⁵⁹ The world community failed to rally any sustained interest in questioning the legitimacy of the “merger.” Sikkim’s experiment in creating and shaping a modern national identity was cut short or, as some critics say, failed. Yet, in the elections of 1979, six years after the demonstrations, the ruling party, the faction that facilitated Sikkim’s annexation, lost all but one seat in the legislative assembly. Inspired by the nationalistic sentiments of the deposed Chogyal and promising “de-merger,” Nar Bahadur Bhandari’s Janata Parishad emerged as the ruling party. Their victory was anchored in opposition to the annexation and fueled by Sikkimese nationalism. In the intervening years, however, the tenuous unity demonstrated in the 1979 elections disintegrated. A society once split into two main political communities is today splintered into almost as many ethno-linguistic groups as live in Sikkim, each community clinging to its tribal or caste roots in the hopes of claiming economic and political privileges.

Sikkim is at a crossroads. A generation has passed since the kingdom was incorporated into the Indian union; the number of Sikkimese who remember the state as a kingdom dwindles. Its population increases at an accelerated rate, much of the growth due to

⁵⁸ 6,000 men from Lachen and Lachung converged at the north district headquarters in Mangan ready to travel to Gangtok to defend their king with swords and sticks. They were turned back by the Indian army. The Chogyal had also communicated to them that he would not sanction the armed resistance. See Datta-Ray, p. 184.

⁵⁹ Many blame India for stage-managing these developments. Others argue that the Chogyal’s political system, based on parity for the two main political groups, led to great disaffection among politically conscious Nepali Sikkimese—and ultimately the anti-Chogyal demonstrations of 1973. For different interpretations of what happened, see the following: Sunanda Datta-Ray’s *Smash and Grab*; P.N. Dhar, “The Merger of Sikkim” in *Indira Gandhi, the ‘Emergency’, and Indian Democracy* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); B.S. Das, *The Sikkim Saga* (Delhi: Vikas, 1983). Leo Rose, “Modern Sikkim in an Historical Perspective.” L.B. Basnet’s *Sikkim: A Short Political History* covers events until just after the 1973 demonstrations.

migration from other Indian states. As if to parallel the demographic shift in Sikkim at the turn of the twentieth century, the majority Nepali Sikkimese face the possibility of becoming a minority in their own state in the twenty-first century.⁶⁰ In light of the changed political circumstances and demographic realities, how might Sikkimese imagine and assert their regional identity—one that affirms yet transcends the ethnic and cultural plurality that has both handicapped and enriched the former kingdom? As we have seen in this examination of the quest for Sikkimese national identity in the 1960s and 1970s, there is no simple way to reconcile the conflicting requirements of a multi-ethnic society. Furthermore, it remains to be seen if the preservation and reinvention of Sikkimese identity is even a priority in the state. That said, in this age of the nation-state, there are multiple examples around the world—on the southern fringes of Russia, along the coast and in the mountains of northern Spain, in the northwestern reaches of India—where minority groups with distinct identities thrive. Those examples, together with an analysis of the pitfalls and successes of the experiment of the 1960s and 1970s, can perhaps offer guidance for the Sikkimese people as they traverse the twenty-first century.

⁶⁰ Article 371F of the Indian constitution (1975) gives Parliament the power to reserve seats in the Sikkim state legislative assembly for various communities in order to protect their rights and interests. In 1975 fifteen seats were reserved for Nepali Sikkimese and fifteen for Bhutia-Lepchas. In 1979 the Bhutia-Lepcha seats were reduced to twelve, with the definition of “Bhutia” enlarged to include others groups of Tibetan descent. The Nepali Sikkimese seats were eliminated, thus making it likely that, with the mostly unchecked influx of outsiders to the state, their interests, too, will soon be submerged.

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