

“A DIFFICULT COUNTRY, A HOSTILE CHIEF, AND A STILL
MORE HOSTILE MINISTER”:
THE ANGLO-SIKKIM WAR OF 1861

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INTRODUCTION

Many gaps in our knowledge of 19th century Sikkimese history have recently been filled in.¹ This paper attempts to add another piece to the jigsaw by examining the previously neglected history of the events of 1860-61, when British forces marched into Sikkim. The royal archives Saul Mullard has been cataloguing are silent on this period except for a Tibetan language copy of the eventual Treaty, and the *History of Sikkim*'s account is superficial.² This paper consequently relies primarily on the records of the British imperial government, which do, however, enable us to gain some insights into Sikkimese perspectives.

BACKGROUND

Following their victory in the 1815 Anglo-Nepal war, in which the Sikkimese had assisted them, the British returned to Sikkim territory

I would like to dedicate this paper to my friends and colleagues, the late Yap Tashi Tobden and Khendzong Yapla (Tsering Wangchuk), tragically killed soon after the NIT Golden Jubilee conference in Gangtok in 2008. The loss of the two local figures perhaps most concerned with the Sikkimese Bhutia history is a major one.

- ¹ See in particular the articles by John Bray, Tirtha Misra, Pema Wangchuk, and Alex McKay in *Buddhist Himalaya*, the Proceedings of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology Golden Jubilee Conference, edited by Alex McKay and Anna Balikci-Denjongpa; Gangtok, 2011.
- ² Personal communication, Saul Mullard (to whom my thanks are due for organising this panel at the IATS seminar in Vancouver 2010). His Highness the Maharaja Sir Thutob Namgyal and Maharani Yeshay Dolma, *History of Sikkim* (Kazi Dousandsup; trans.), printed in Gangtok, 1908, p.66 describes the 1860-61 campaign only briefly, noting that when the Superintendent of Darjeeling came up to Rinchenpong with Tseepa Adan (Chebu Lama), “a few skirmishes took place ... the Superintendent was obliged to return to Darjeeling for reinforcements and came back with a force under Col. Gauler [sic] as military officer and the late Sir Ashlay [sic] Eden (then Mr Eden) as Political Officer as far as Teesta.”

that it had lost to Gurkha conquest in preceding decades. In return the British obtained, by the 1817 Treaty of Titalia, influence over Sikkimese foreign relations; the right of return of fugitives from British justice; and protection for British Indian merchants from exorbitant taxation. This Treaty actually lapsed from desuetude,³ but Sikkim naturally regarded the British favourably in the period after 1815, and in 1835 granted their request to use the hamlet of Dorje Ling (rDo rje gling) as a sanatorium.

As Hope Namgyal (i.e.: Hope Cooke, the American wife of the last Chogyal of Sikkim), argued, traditional Sikkimese understanding was that their land belonged to the King, even when he granted others the rights to use it.⁴ The 1835 grant to the British was thus conditional in Sikkimese understanding. When it became clear that the British had actually annexed Darjeeling, relations between the two parties deteriorated. But the British payment of an annual subsidy of Rs 3,000 to the Chogyal from 1841, increased to Rs 6,000 in 1846, seems to have partly resolved the issue—although in Sikkimese understanding this was probably seen as rent for Darjeeling.

Such cultural misunderstandings played an important part in the subsequent conflict, but equally important were the problematic personalities of the leading men on each side. For the British the key figure was Dr Archibald Campbell. Appointed Superintendent of Darjeeling in 1839, he is credited with being the prime mover in its development. A member of the Bengal Medical Service, and previously medical officer at the Residency in Kathmandu, Campbell's appointment was consistent with the medical impetus behind the establishment of Darjeeling as a Hill Station, but in the late 1820s he had also been involved in mediating the Kotapa rebellion, during which many Darjeeling Lepchas reportedly fled to Nepal to escape Sikkimese rule. In Darjeeling, Campbell was the British official in closest contact with Sikkim, which maintained a representative, the *vakil*, in Darjeeling.

The 7th Chogyal (*chos rgyal*)—or in British terminology, the Raja—Tsugphud Namgyal (gTsug phud rnam rgyal), ruled from 1793. He was thus elderly by 1861 and actually lived in the Chumbi Valley, where he increasingly devoted himself to religious matters. Political

³ Alastair Lamb, *British India and Tibet 1766-1910*, London, Routledge, 2nd revised edition, 1986, p.39.

⁴ Hope Namgyal, 'The Sikkimese theory of landholding and the Darjeeling grant', *Bulletin of Tibetology* 1966 (3.2), pp.46-58; this article cites a number of documents from Sikkim archives and is essential reading in this context.

power in Sikkim largely devolved to his Chief Minister, or Dewan.⁵ That religious preoccupation, incidentally, is seen by Sikkimese as appropriate to the ruler's position, but in British understanding political rule was a secular concern, so that was another of the cultural misunderstandings between the two states.

A number of problems between the two powers during the 1840s and '50s were due to the different legal systems in use. Sikkimese tax defaulters, debtors (including landlords owing rent to the Chogyal), what the British referred to as 'slaves' and other such persons could take refuge in Darjeeling, where the British refused to return them. Similarly those considered criminals by the British found refuge in Sikkim. There were, incidentally, labour shortages in both areas, and with control over labour rather than land critical to political power in the Himalayas, this may be an unconsidered factor here, one encouraging settlers on both sides, even those of dubious backgrounds.

In 1847, Sikkim's Dewan, Ilam Singh, who was trusted by Campbell, died. He was replaced by Tokhang Donyer (*mgron gnyer*) Namgyal, a Tibetan married to the Chogyal's daughter by a concubine.⁶ As a Tibetan and a layman, he was a divisive figure, remembered in Sikkim under the name Pagla Dewan, or 'Mad Dewan.'⁷

The most prominent representative of the factions opposing him in Sikkim was Tseepa Adan, known to the British as Chebu Lama. The Adan clan claimed origins in Kham, but had long intermarried with Lepchas, and at least today, consider themselves Lepcha. Chebu Lama appears to have been the most prominent representative of the factions opposed to the Tibetan Dewan, and in foreign affairs Chebu Lama favoured accommodation with the British where the Dewan favoured Tibetan policies of excluding foreign influence. Further complicating the issues was the fact that Chebu Lama apparently wanted the position

⁵ Technically a more appropriate term would be Lord Chamberlain as his rank was actually *mgron gnyer* (Lord Chamberlain) and not *phyag mdzod* (Chancellor). Technically the rank of *mgron gnyer* was lower (politically) than that of *phyag mdzod*, and one must assume that Namgyal eclipsed the *phyag mdzod* in his influence over the Chogyal on account of his affinity with Tsugphud Namgyal through his illegitimate daughter. It may also be the case that as he was in daily contact with Chogyal as his position put him in charge of the royal household, his influence was greater than the *phyag mdzod*, much like that of the Groom of the stool in medieval England. I am indebted to Saul Mullard for this point.

⁶ FO371 / 2318 (Foreign Office, Public Record Office, London), "Chiefs and Leading Families in Sikkim" 1915. This concubine was the maid servant of his second wife. I am indebted to Anna Balikci-Denjongpa for this reference.

⁷ Whether this term derives from the British or the Sikkimese is uncertain.

of Dewan for himself, and problems with the succession to the throne brought his ambitions in direct conflict with Dewan Namgyal.

The Tibetan Dewan supported the claims of a younger illegitimate son of the Chogyal, the Changzod Karpo, who was his wife's brother. It appears that Chebu Lama, however, wanted the Chogyal's legitimate elder sons to marry and produce an heir, although both were monastics. After the death of the first son Labrang Kyabgon (also known as Labrang Kusho) Chebu Lama persuaded the Dalai Lama to free the second son, Sidkeong Namgyal (1819-1874), from his vow of celibacy in order to produce an heir. He married in 1848, but failed to produce an heir, and the machinations around the departure from monastic codes of conduct seem to have damaged Chebu Lama's relations with the ruling Chogyal.⁸

In the following year, 1849, Sikkim posted a new pro-Dewan *vakil* in Darjeeling. Dr Campbell then made his infamous visit to Sikkim and Tibet with Dr Joseph Hooker, the botanist. Campbell hoped to discuss the new *vakil* with the reclusive Chogyal, and also had a long-standing desire to see Tibet. Prevented by the Dewan's men from reaching Tumlong and meeting the Chogyal, Campbell and Hooker, who were accompanied by Chebu Lama, succeeded in reaching Chumbi. But after being refused entry to Tibet, Campbell was arrested by the Dewan's men, bound and held for six weeks. (Hooker was also arrested, but was allowed to continue botanising, indicating Campbell and Chebu Lama were the real targets of this action.) British protests secured their release in time for the party to return to Darjeeling on Christmas eve, 1849, and the Dewan seems to have regarded the matter as closed; he actually accompanied Campbell's party back to Darjeeling in order to trade some ponies!⁹

The British government actually had little sympathy for Campbell's suffering, considering him the architect of his own misfortunes. But some response to his arrest was necessary for reasons of prestige. The annual payment to Sikkim was stopped,¹⁰ and 640 square miles of the Sikkim Terai linking Darjeeling to the Bengal plains' districts was annexed and placed under Darjeeling.¹¹

⁸ Lamb, *British India ...*, pp.72-73: *History of Sikkim*, pp.94-95. The exact details and chronology are difficult to reconstruct with certainty.

⁹ Lamb, *British India ...*, p.76.

¹⁰ *History of Sikkim*, pp.66, 68.

¹¹ L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*, Logos Press, New Delhi, 1999; (First published, 1907), pp.24-25.

Dewan Namgyal subsequently lost influence in Sikkim, and Chebu Lama became *vakil* in Darjeeling. But the Dewan's eclipse was temporary. Within a few years he had re-established his position in Sikkim, and Campbell, in addition to his presumed personal desire for revenge on his former jailer, continued to be frustrated by the legal shortcomings of relations with Sikkim. As the British put it, "some subjects of the Rajah ..., who eventually turned out to be relations of the Dewan, kidnapped on various occasions, within the British territory, subjects of the British Government."¹² Of course from the Sikkimese perspective, those 'kidnapped' were Sikkimese subjects fugitive from Sikkimese justice, and their 'kidnapping' was not only within traditional Himalayan judicial practices, but was in any case from what they saw as their own territory.

In the wider context, the regional situation in 1860 should be noted. The Second Opium War between Britain and China was fought between 1856 and 1860, ending in British victory with the signing of the Peking Convention in October 1860; so China saw her power being diminished by an expanding British Empire. Nepal invaded Tibet in 1856, in which year the 12th Dalai Lama was born. Tibet was thus ruled by a Regent, from Reting, whom internal opposition forced to flee to China, and the Regent died on his return journey after the Emperor intervened.¹³ So it was an unstable period in Tibetan history, with the Chinese Ambans apparently the main power in Lhasa, and Tibet's relations with Sikkim must have been heavily influenced by the Amban's isolationist policies, and fear of British intentions must have been a powerful force in their understanding of Tibet's relations with Sikkim.

For the British, however, the events of 1857-58, the 'Indian Mutiny' were uppermost in their minds. While that conflict did not reach into the Himalayas, knowledge of it spread widely, and it was a serious blow to British prestige in the region.

Campbell's invasion

On 1 November 1860, Campbell made a decisive move. Having obtained authority to occupy a small portion of Sikkimese territory to

¹² J.C. Gawler, *Sikkim. With Hints on Mountain and Jungle Warfare: Exhibiting also the facilities for opening commercial relations through the State of Sikkim with Central Asia, Thibet, and Western China*, Bibhash Gupta, Calcutta, 1987 (first published, 1873), p.9.

¹³ W.D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History*, N.Y., Potala, 1984, p.186.

obtain, “satisfaction for insults and injuries done to British subjects, and for the violation of British territory”, Campbell led an attack on Sikkim.¹⁴ Accompanied by Chebu Lama, he marched into Sikkim with a force of 100 local troops from a sappers and miners unit. Campbell seems to have had another 80 men from that force available, but prudently stationed them on the frontier with Nepal to prevent the Gurkhas taking advantage of the situation.¹⁵

Unfortunately for Campbell, his force was ill-equipped for combat. Lacking military experience, and lulled by the good reception the mission received from local people, Campbell’s forces were routed by a surprise attack on November 27th. What was described as a “mixed force of Thibetans and Sikhim Bhooteas” under the Dewan’s command, forced their hasty retreat. Weapons and supplies were abandoned in the panic. Campbell fled back to Darjeeling after what was clearly a massive blow to British prestige in the region.¹⁶

Asked to explain why, “he allowed himself to be so completely deceived”, Campbell suggested that the Dewan, empowered by knowledge of the Anglo-Chinese war and hoping for support from the Chinese at Lhasa, had launched what Campbell always referred to as a ‘treacherous’ attack. But China’s defeat was surely certain by then, and as even the Government of India noted, no treachery was apparent; Campbell had simply been attacked by a hostile force in enemy territory.¹⁷ He was judged to have committed a,

grave error... in sending so small a force into the Sikhim territory
No presumption of the friendly disposition of the people ... ought to
have suffered to blind the British agent to the danger of sending a

¹⁴ (British) Parliamentary Papers (hereafter PP:), *Copy of Extracts of despatches relating to the Sikhim Expedition*, Printed by the House of Commons, 1862; A.R. Young, Secretary, Government of India (hereafter; GoI) to Hon Ashley Eden (hereafter; Eden), 28 December 1860.

¹⁵ PP: Secretary, Government of Bengal to Secretary, GoI, 13 February 1861, enclosing Campbell to Secretary Government of Bengal, 2 January 1861.

¹⁶ Gawler, *Sikkim...*, pp.9-10.

¹⁷ PP: Secretary, Government of Bengal to Secretary, GoI, 13 February 1861, enclosing Campbell to Secretary Government of Bengal, 2 January 1861; Secretary, GoI to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 22 February 1861.

detachment of 130 men¹⁸ into a difficult country, ruled by a hostile chief, and a still more hostile minister.¹⁹

Campbell's reputation suffered greatly, but in the context of the times his initiative forced colonial government intervention to protect British prestige and interests on the frontier.

Gawler and Eden's mission

Within weeks, Lieutenant-Colonel John Cox Gawler²⁰ was appointed to command a force of nearly 2,000 men equipped with rockets and a mountain gun; giving it the firepower Campbell's force had lacked.²¹

Gawler's orders were to,

...extract ... satisfaction for insults and injuries done to British subjects, and for violation of British territory... The discredit which we have suffered by the ineffectual attempt at coercion, and by the retreat of the Superintendent ..., must be removed, and an end must be put to the presumption which manifestly it has engendered in the Rajah's people.²²

¹⁸ The precise number of Campbell's force is difficult to ascertain; the total of 130 may include coolies, etc, O'Malley, *Bengal District...*, p.25, gives the figure as '160 natives and a complement of English and non-commissioned officers.'

¹⁹ PP: C. Wood, Secretary of State to Governor General, 23 March 1861; also see, Secretary, GoI to Eden, 28 December 1860.

²⁰ Colonel J.C.Gawler (1830-1882) was later Keeper of the Crown Jewels; his publications include, *Dan, The Pioneer of Israel*, W.H. Guest, London, 1875, and 'British Troops and Savage Warfare: with special reference to the Kaffir wars' in *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, 17, 1873. Gawler is now a prominent figure in the New Age. He was Jewish, the son of a Colonel who had written a history of Jews in Britain, and his 1875 book *Our Scythian Ancestors Identified with Israel* is much cited on the net. It claims to identify the Scythians as a lost tribe of Israel who became the Scots and thus provide the British Royal family with a Jewish origin. This idea was later followed by L.A. Waddell, Younghusband's Chief Medical Officer and pioneer of Tibetan Buddhist studies. General Mainwaring with his idea of the Lepchas as one of the lost tribes of Israel is another relevant name here. The construction of such ideas by the imperial officers in this time and place seems remarkable and worthy of further investigation.

²¹ Gawler was described by Government as, 'an officer of tried experience in dealing with an uncivilised enemy'; PP: Secretary, GoI to Eden, 28 December 1860; also see Gawler, *Sikkim...*, p.1.

²² Gawler, *Sikkim...*, p.10; also see copy of his instructions of 28 December 1860, pp.87-88.

In other words, this was about *prestige*; Campbell's retreat threatened the prestige of the British Empire, and with the Mutiny still fresh in mind, British power had to be clearly demonstrated. This, it was considered, could, "...be done only by showing promptly that resistance to us is hopeless."²³

The Hon. Ashley Eden²⁴ of the Bengal Civil Service was appointed Political Officer on the mission which Gawler described as being intended to "counteract the political effect which [Campbell's failed attack]... will have upon Thibet and Bhotan."²⁵ In London, the Secretary of State²⁶ regretted but approved the need to invade a "semi barbarous state, the complete subjugation of which can add nothing to the military or political greatness of the empire".

It was made clear that the chief targets of the mission were the Dewan, and—if he proved uncooperative—the Chogyal; for the British was uncertain of his position. "Atonement ... manifest to all" required the surrender or banishment of the Dewan—"the chief cause of the aggressions", and an apology and compensation from the Raja. If both fled, the mission was to ensure, "the destruction of their residences and property".²⁷

Eden, the Political Officer, was instructed to "spare no precaution or exertion to befriend the people who are believed to be for the most part opposed to the acts of their rulers."²⁸ Well, was there a division between ruler and ruled? The British had good intelligence on Sikkim; Gawler studied Hooker's maps and his *Himalayan Journals*: "Never" he wrote, "was an officer commanding a force favoured with a fuller, more able, or more lucid report of a country and its inhabitants than I was by the study of Dr. Hooker."²⁹

In addition, Chebu Lama had a crucial role on the mission. He recommended the route to be taken, and was the only person capable of diplomatic correspondence with the Sikkimese. Coolies—the

²³ PP: Secretary, GoI to Eden, 28 December 1860.

²⁴ The Honourable Ashley Eden KCSI, CIE, ICS (1831-1887), 3rd son of Lord Auckland, educated Rugby and Winchester; posted to India 1852, Governor of Burma 1871-77, Lt-Governor of Bengal 1877-1882, Secretary of State's Council for India, 1882-87.

²⁵ His actual appointment was as 'temporary Envoy and Special Commissioner in Sikkim'; PP: Secretary, GoI to Eden, 28 December 1860.

²⁶ Sir Charles Wood (1800-1885), 1st Viscount Halifax, Eton & Oxford, Liberal M.P.1826-66, Secretary of State for India 1859-1866.

²⁷ PP: Secretary, GoI to Eden, 28 December 1860.

²⁸ PP: Secretary, GoI to Eden, 28 December 1860.

²⁹ Gawler, *Sikkim...*, pp.2-3; also see PP: Under-Secretary, Government of Bengal to Eden, 18 February 1861.

responsibility for whose recruitment was given to Dr Campbell, proved hard to obtain—which further discredited Campbell. Most of those used were actually Chebu Lama's 'ryots' [ie; tenant farmers]. For organising the coolies the Lama initially received Rs50 a month, until Eden deemed it inappropriate for him to receive wages. Instead, at the conclusion of the mission he was given a gold watch and chain and Rs500.³⁰

So, with Hooker, Chebu Lama and perhaps Campbell as informants, how did the mission view the divisions in Sikkimese society? They considered that,

The Lamas ... are said to be generally well disposed to us, and... are more likely to understand our power and the importance of coming to terms with us, and to influence the Rajah and the governing powers to this effect, than any other class.³¹

So they recognised monastic power in Sikkimese society. They also drew a simplistic distinction between Bhutias and Lepchas that ignored the actualities of local identities. The two groups were said by Eden to be divided by the succession dispute, with Lepchas supporting the Chogyal's monk son and the Bhutia's supporting the Dewan's relative. They saw power as being largely in Bhutia hands, for it was observed that the, "Lepchas do not want to fight ... but their children and cattle are in the hands of the Bhooteahs."³² Using a common imperial strategy, Eden wrote that, "I hope that one party may be played off against the other".³³ He also hoped to use the Lepchas to catch the Dewan, and wanted to offer a reward for his capture (although that was not approved until after the mission had ended).³⁴

Of particular interest is Eden's statement that, "[t]here are with the Dewan about 80 or 100 Thibetan fighting men, and this small body

³⁰ Gawler, *Sikkim...*, p.57; PP: Eden to Government of Bengal 7 February 1861; Secretary, Government of Bengal to Eden, 15 February 1861; Under-Secretary, GoI to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 16 April 1861. The forms of payment may relate to status (middle ranks receive salary, elites get rewards) or be due to Chebu Lama's position as a Buddhist monk, and thus barred from salary according to *vinaya* rules of monastic conduct.

³¹ PP: Secretary, GoI to Eden, 28 December 1860.

³² PP: Eden to Under-Secretary, Government of Bengal, 12 February 1861.

³³ PP: Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 22 January 1861.

³⁴ PP: See comments on reward in Under-Secretary, GoI to Under-Secretary, Government of Bengal, 2 February 1861, and Secretary of State to Governor General, 24 April 1861.

appears to keep the whole of Sikkim under his power”.³⁵ These Tibetan troops are nowhere else referred to, but it is not impossible that Dewan Namgyal had a levy of Tibetans, whether they were really ‘fighting men’ or a personal bodyguard from his estates in Chumbi is another matter. But Eden also noted that villagers at Teesta, “belong principally to Thibet, but partly to Sikkim, paying revenue to both sides.”³⁶ This suggests there is still much we don’t know about the nature of the Sikkim-Tibet relationship, although that high culture in both states was heavily Sinified is suggested by Eden’s statement after he had finally met the Raja. He described how, “[t]he whole appearance of the Raja’s house and furniture, the nature of the ceremonies, and the dress of the Raja and his people, were thoroughly Chinese.”³⁷

The campaign

Having despatched a letter to the Raja of Sikkim containing their demands, the British waited five days and then, on 1 February 1861, Gawler’s forces marched out of Darjeeling en route to Tumlong, the then Sikkimese capital. Gawler hoped that, “the instructions from Government will be to give the enemy his first lesson in ‘Tumloong’, ... and if necessary to destroy it.”³⁸ After a march which Eden described as “probably one of the most difficult and fatiguing which has ever been made by European troops in this country,” they reached the Rangit river, which they crossed at night after hastily building a 120 by 10ft [approx 40 x 3 mtrs] floating bamboo bridge. This took the Sikkimese forces by surprise, and they withdrew from their base across the river under rocket fire.³⁹

As the British marched on to Teesta, the opposition fell away, fleeing their bases at Namchi and Temi, where on 17 February Eden was able to report the news that Dewan Namgyal had fled to Tibet.⁴⁰

³⁵ PP: Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 22 January 1861.

³⁶ PP: Eden to Under-Secretary, Government of Bengal, 12 February 1861.

³⁷ PP: Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 14 March 1861.

³⁸ Gawler, *Sikkim...*, p.11.

³⁹ PP: Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 5 February 1861.

⁴⁰ PP: Eden to Government of Bengal, 7 February 1861; Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 17 February 1861. Despite his exile, the Dewan continued to be involved in Tibetan affairs until his death in 1888, see for example, *History of Sikkim*, p.69 concerning his mediation with Bhutan in a criminal case. He was actually permitted to re-enter Sikkim in 1873 to meet the British envoy, J.W. Edgar, whom he impressed; see J.W. Edgar, ‘*Report on a visit to Sikkim and the Thibetan frontier*’, Calcutta, Government Press, 1874, pp.9-10.

On the 26th, the Sikkimese were reported to be pulling down their fort at Neh, “where they had repulsed the Gurkhas in ‘the old war’ [1815]”, and hostilities were effectively over.⁴¹ There had been no sustained battles, just a few exchanges of fire with a handful of British wounded. Sikkimese casualties also seem to have been very low and Eden later wrote proudly of how victory did not need to mean inflicting huge casualties on the enemy.⁴²

Eden had actually formed a good impression of the Sikkimese; one which foretold British impressions in the 20th century, if not in the era of John Claude White. Eden wrote that,

In frankness and open-heartedness, [the Sikkimese] appeared to me to approach the European standard more nearly than any other oriental race. They are free from all scruples of caste, truthful, hospitable, and in many respects far more civilised than the natives of Hindoostan.⁴³

Once Dewan Namgyal had fled, the campaign was effectively over. The Sikkimese went to great lengths to fulfil the demand that they return property abandoned by Campbell’s retreating forces, prisoners taken at that time were handed over to the British, and villagers, who had initially hidden in the jungle when the invading force arrived, now set up markets to sell fresh fruit and other produce to the soldiers. Eden received a “submissive and friendly letter” from the Raja, who had ordered his *vakils* to obey Eden’s wishes.⁴⁴

Eden thus prepared a Treaty to end hostilities formally. The Chogyal was still in Chumbi, and when informed that he or his monk son should come down to Sikkim to sign a treaty, abdicated the throne in favour of his son. According to the *History of Sikkim*, this was because Chebu Lama “sent up the Phodrang Lama purposely to say that if the Maharaja’s son ... came down then the treaty would be favourable to the Sikkimites.”⁴⁵ That would seem to be Chebu Lama’s initiative rather than the British, and an indication of his inclinations.

The new Raja, the 8th Chogyal Sridkyong Namgyal, came to Eden, stating that he would reside permanently in Sikkim and move his capital to a place more convenient for trade and relations with Darjeeling. So at Tumlong on 28 March 1861, in a monastery near the

⁴¹ PP: Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 26 February 1861

⁴² PP: Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 8 April 1861.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ PP: Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 28 February 1861.

⁴⁵ *History of Sikkim*, p.67; also see Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 21 March 1861.

new Rajah's house,⁴⁶ the Treaty of Tumlong was signed. Its main features—typical of those made by the British with neighbouring states—were an extradition agreement, free trade and travel between the two powers, and Sikkim's consent to maintain the road the British planned to build up to the Tibetan frontier. But most unusual for an international agreement was that the fate of single individual (other than a ruler), was also specified; the Treaty's 7th article stated that Dewan Namgyal and his immediate family were barred from Sikkim.

Sikkim was also charged Rs7000 to compensate for losses suffered in Campbell's initial invasion. Campbell presented claims for Rs10,836 of personal property lost by his force. Eden noted that;

He has furnished no details of the items ... neither do the claims appear to have been investigated or established by any proof. I do not think that the Sikkim Durbar can possibly pay anything like this amount; it exceeds the revenue of ten years.⁴⁷

The Bengal Government asked Campbell to explain the claims, which it felt, "do not stand upon any strong grounds."⁴⁸ Eden considered the sappers and miners' claims to have thrown away cash and jewellery "manifestly absurd", adding that, "[t]he more I hear of the details of this flight, the more disgraceful does it seem ... men so thoroughly undrilled and disorganised should not have been detailed for this duty."⁴⁹ None-the-less, presumably to keep the soldiers contented in this post-Mutiny era, the indemnity was only reduced to what Eden's figures would suggest was seven year's state revenue.

But as Eden's tone indicates, Campbell was clearly on the outer.⁵⁰ While renowned as the 'Founding Father' of Darjeeling, his Government found his actions in regard to Sikkim an embarrassment. The Secretary of State agreed Campbell's explanations for his failed invasion were "unsatisfactory",⁵¹ and Eden's appointment as Envoy to

⁴⁶ Gawler, *Sikkim...*, p.73; the name of the monastery is not given, but is probably Phodong.

⁴⁷ PP: Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 17 February 1861.

⁴⁸ PP: Secretary, Government of Bengal to Under-Secretary, GoI, 6 March 1861.

⁴⁹ PP: Eden to Secretary Government of Bengal, 26-2-61,

⁵⁰ Dr Campbell (1805-1874), left his position as Superintendent in Darjeeling in 1862 according to Charles Darwin, see Duncan M. Porter, *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin; Volume 14*, London 1866, p.39, n2; Ram Rahul, however, in 'Sikkim of History', *International Studies*, 15.1, 1976, pp.15-28, gives his date of departure as 1864. [Accessed copy, 17 June 2010; www.isq.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/15/1/15.pdf]

⁵¹ PP: Secretary of State to Governor General, 30 April 1861.

Sikkim, with Campbell simply ordered to give Eden all assistance,⁵² clearly indicate his superiors had lost all faith in him.

Throughout the mission, Campbell had continued to be an embarrassment. He suggested that the Bhutanese might ally with the Sikkimese, a suggestion promptly dismissed. British relations with Bhutan were then the responsibility of the Political Officer in Assam, and the Government of Bengal informed the Government of India that it did not, “think that our relations with Bhootan should be entrusted to the hands of Dr Campbell.”⁵³

During the campaign, Campbell began reporting rumours circulating in Darjeeling of an imminent attack on the town by the Sikkimese. Eden initially dismissed the rumours,⁵⁴ and when they recurred he complained that the, “state of considerable alarm from some imaginary foe” tended to “lower our character in the eyes of the natives”.⁵⁵ That brought a repost from the Government of Bengal warning Campbell against upsetting Darjeeling residents, and cuttingly suggesting he dispense with any informant giving him such information.⁵⁶ Campbell, as noted, was also blamed for the lack of coolies, but ultimately his retreat in November 1860 was obviously considered unforgiveable, not least by Eden. The Political Officer forwarded a statement by two British Indian employees who had been captured by the Dewan’s forces. In it they stated they had been questioned by the Dewan as to, “why the burra sahib (i.e.; Campbell) ran away from his camp. Is this the bravery of a man or a woman?”⁵⁷

The Sikkimese

As noted, the British sources describe different factions in Sikkim; the Tibetan Dewan with his Bhutia supporters and perhaps his own armed forces, and the Lepcha and monastic groups. They claim that the succession dispute brought these differences into the open; for the succession would shape Sikkim’s future, which was what these divisions were primarily concerned with.

⁵² PP: Secretary, GoI to Superintendent Darjeeling, 28 December 1860.

⁵³ PP: Superintendent Darjeeling, to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 20 December 1860; Secretary, Government of Bengal to Deputy Secretary, GoI, 27 January 1861.

⁵⁴ PP: Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 29 March 1861.

⁵⁵ PP: Eden to Under-Secretary, Government of Bengal, 12 February 1861.

⁵⁶ PP: Secretary, Government of Bengal, to Superintendent Darjeeling, 15 February 1861.

⁵⁷ PP: Statement by Tareeny Sunker Mojoomdar and Abdul Eshak to Eden, 21 February 1861. Eden could have suppressed this had he chosen to do so.

The British Indian prisoners noted, describe their capture by one Dalhong Yaboo, and detention by Padong Shenga, who handed them to the Dewan. At Tumlong they were put in the stocks, “through the wickedness of Nambuck Bhootea”, but the Beri Khazi released them and sent them to Yangang with the permission of the Tachong Lama. They were then passed around other monastic establishments. Here, their statement that, “most of the Lamas of the monasteries are very wicked and obedient to [the Dewan]”, seems to contradict Eden’s earlier assumption of monastic support.⁵⁸ But it may simply indicate divisions within the monastic establishment.

Of others we may identify, Lasso Khaji (La sogs blon po) had been in touch with Eden from the start of the mission and, “had throughout held aloof from the war party”.⁵⁹ His house was burned down by the Dewan’s men, but he was subsequently rewarded by the British.⁶⁰ The Gangtok Kazi came over to the British in time to be rewarded also, but as a General (Ru dpon) in the Sikkimese army, he had originally been listed along with “Singlam Soubah” and “Kabi Kazee” as among the Dewan’s party.⁶¹ The Pemayantse ‘abbot’ also opposed to the Dewan,⁶² as did the “Chota Dewan” (‘little’ Dewan), a cousin of Chebu Lama whose name is not mentioned but who was thus an obvious figure for Eden to cultivate.⁶³

After the Treaty, Chebu Lama, who Eden considered, “the most intelligent and enlightened native I have ever met”, became Dewan.⁶⁴ Eden stated that, “[s]o long as he remains in that post there is no fear of any policy being adopted hostile to British interests.”⁶⁵ But Chebu Lama’s reputation at court had suffered, whether from his ostentatious support for the invading forces, as a result of his role in the marriage of Sidkeong Namgyal, or because of his role in Sidkeong Namgyal’s ascension. The *History of Sikkim* records another issue, that Chebu Lama appropriated “a large part of the annual payment” from the British, which was resumed in 1862 and increased to Rs 9,000 in 1868.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ PP: Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 8 April 1861; also see Gawler, *Sikkim...*, p.41.

⁶⁰ PP: Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 29 March 1861.

⁶¹ PP: Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 17 February 1861; Eden to Under-Secretary, Government of Bengal, 12 February 1861.

⁶² PP: Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 22 February 1861.

⁶³ PP: Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 28 February 1861

⁶⁴ But he apparently also remained (in Darjeeling) as *vakil* – perhaps he divided his time between Darjeeling and Tumlong?

⁶⁵ PP: Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 8 April 1861.

He is also said to have taken “the lion’s share” of Rs 20,000 the British gave the new Chogyal to get him out of debt.⁶⁶

The British, however, could now deal directly with the new Chogyal. (The old Raja, who remained in Chumbi, died in 1863.) Eden was satisfied that “... under the advice of Cheeboo Lama, an entirely new state of things will now be inaugurated in Sikkim.”⁶⁷ And Anglo-Sikkimese relations did improve during the 8th Chogyal’s reign, which was marked by his visit to Darjeeling to meet the Lt-Governor of Bengal in 1873 and the subsequent visit to Sikkim by the then Deputy Commissioner in Darjeeling, J.W.Edgar, who hoped to gain a formal trading agreement with Tibet. Only after the Chogyal’s death in 1874 did Anglo-Sikkimese relations again deteriorate.

Consequences and subsequent events

It is no coincidence that in February 1861 the Government of India sanctioned a British mission to Lhasa (although it was eventually cancelled on the advice of the British authorities in China).⁶⁸ Opening Tibet to British Indian trade was already one of the main objectives of officials such as Campbell,⁶⁹ Hodgson in Nepal, and the missionaries around Tibet’s frontiers. Sikkim seemed the ideal route to Lhasa, and in summing up Gawler and Eden’s mission the Government of India observed, “...a satisfactory conclusion [and] a fair prospect of extended commercial intercourse with Sikkim, and with the hitherto inaccessible country beyond it.”⁷⁰

Certainly the 1861 Treaty increased Sikkim’s opening to the world, or at least to the colonial state, with a number of travellers, surveyors, and road-builders entering the country in the ensuing decades. Sikkim now became the main focus of British efforts to reach Lhasa. Here we might note that Gawler’s book appears in most bibliographies under the title *Sikkim. With Hints on Mountain and Jungle Warfare*. But there is actually more to the sub-title, which continues, *Exhibiting also the*

⁶⁶ *History of Sikkim*, p.67.

⁶⁷ PP: Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 14 March 1861.

⁶⁸ Lamb, *British India...*, pp.90-92.

⁶⁹ Gawler and Campbell submitted a Memo to the Secretary of State for India in April 1873 which recommended establishing a consular agency in Chumbi, and ‘eventually ... sending an envoy to Lhasa...’; Gawler, *Sikkim...*, pp.104-05; see re this memo, Lamb, *British India...*, p.105.

⁷⁰ PP: Under-Secretary, GoI to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 7 May 1861.

*facilities for opening commercial relations through the State of Sikkim with Central Asia, Thibet, and Western China.*⁷¹

In 1861 the British recognised that annexing Sikkim would be of no economic or political benefit. What they sought, and Campbell forced, was agreement over trans-border legal issues and the opening of trade and access to Sikkim and Tibet. But in expelling Dewan Namgyal the 1861 Treaty also forced Sikkim to conform more closely to modern state models, in which a single authority has a monopoly over foreign relations and the use of legalised force within its fixed territory. No longer would the ruler of Sikkim live in Tibet.⁷²

We should also note here Alastair Lamb's conclusion that the 1861 campaign was, "without a doubt one of the factors leading to the Bhutan war of 1865". Bhutan gave asylum to many of the Dewan's followers in 1861, something Eden's failed mission to Bhutan in 1863 was intended to discuss.⁷³

CONCLUSIONS

The British-Indian take-over of Sikkim, which culminated in the war of 1888-89, was a process occupying some 70 years. The events of 1860-61 were actually something of an anomaly in that process. Conflict arose due to the 'Mad Dewan's' assumption of power in Sikkim and the incompetence, and no doubt injured feelings, of Dr Campbell. The British military campaign was more a show of strength than a conflict and the treaty that ended it was largely a restatement of the 1817 Treaty. The war hastened the end of the 7th Chogyal's reign, as well as Campbell's career—but had little lasting effect, for the relationship between British India and Sikkim again deteriorated as British moves towards Tibet intensified in the 1870s and '80s.

That the British marched into Sikkim in 1861 was not from any desire to annex Sikkim, or even to take the power there that they gained in 1888. The key factor was prestige; the expulsion of Campbell's forces, little more than a failed police operation, none-the-less damaged British prestige in the Himalayas and Indian Empire so recently shaken by the Mutiny. Restoring prestige demanded victory.

⁷¹ The book is largely composed of official despatches, and makes little mention of Tibet, so perhaps that was added when it was published in 1873 because it had then become a more formulated aim.

⁷² Ironically, when the British Political Officers lived in Gangtok after 1888, they also tended to leave Sikkim for Tibet for several of the rainy months, usually travelling to Chumbi and Gyantse to inspect the Trade Agencies there.

⁷³ Lamb, *British India...*, pp.81-82.

Trade with Sikkim was of little or no importance, and free trade there was only important if, as the British hoped, Tibet was opened to trade via the Sikkim route. But the fact that the Dewan held a trade monopoly in Sikkim⁷⁴ may have been another factor behind British efforts to remove him. In regard to economics, incidentally, we might note how quick local farmers were to sell their produce to the invading troops. That mirrors reports from the Younghusband mission, and perhaps sheds light on the interests and identity of that class.

The role of information gathering in the imperial process is now well-known. In that context the scientific studies of Joseph Hooker are given political consequences by the use of him as a leading guide to the country by Lt-Colonel Gawler.

In conclusion, we might note that the health of Gawler's troops remained "excellent".⁷⁵ This is in stark contrast to the later Anglo-Bhutanese war of 1865, for reasons I can shed no light on.

⁷⁴ O'Malley, 1999:24.

⁷⁵ PP. Eden to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 17 February 1861.

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