

The ghosts of Changlimithang: a brief Anglo-Bhutanese negotiation during the British Expedition to Tibet of 1903–1904



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ABSTRACT

The British Expedition to Tibet of 1903–1904 represented the last major military operation of the Great Game, the broad cultural confrontation between the British and the Russians that contested the geopolitical space of central and high Asia for almost the entire nineteenth century, up until the St. Petersburg entente of 1907. The role assumed by the then Tongsa Penlop, Ugyen Wangchuck, as a mediator between the British and Tibetans during the Expedition, was critical. Among the Bhutanese nobles, Ugyen Wangchuck had emerged victorious from the Battle of Changlimithang in 1885 and in 1907 he was crowned as the first king of Bhutan. In the period between the military victory and his accession to the throne, the power of Ugyen Wangchuck had to be consolidated definitively in a country that was simultaneously involved in the geopolitical space of the Raj, to which it was linked by the Treaty of Sinchula of 1865, and in the cultural sphere of Tibet, its most profound and ancient spiritual heritage. This paper reconstructs through British archival documents an attempt carried out by the Bhutanese with the British — in anticipation of Anglo-Tibetan negotiations — to try to resolve the last internal tensions of Bhutan. Although strongly downsized, some ancient rivalries, like underground rivers, continued to run across the balances of power and the international role of the small Himalayan country at the beginning of the twentieth century.

KEYWORDS

Great Game, Bhutan, British Raj, Tibet, Ugyen Wangchuck, Francis Edward Younghusband

INTRODUCTION²

The British Expedition to Tibet of 1903–1904, also known as the Younghusband Expedition, was the last major military operation of the Great Game. A few years later,

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2 This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 17F17306. Between November 1, 2017, and October 31, 2019, I was a JSPS International Research Fellow at the Kokoro Research Center, Kyoto University. I wish to thank Prof. Seiji Kumagai, Prof. Yoshio Imaeda, Prof. Oren Hanner, Armando Delicato, Namkha Wangdi and Damcho Dorji for their precious advice and help in the bibliographic research.



on August 31, 1907,³ the British and Russians signed the Anglo-Russian Convention in St. Petersburg which defined the status of Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet.⁴ The document formally put an end to that romantic and adventurous confrontation of soldiers and spies lost on the dusty routes or the snowy peaks of Central Asia. The confrontation was primarily cultural, then political and finally psychological, as international dynamics and the geopolitical framework were also measured in the anxieties and obsessions of the British ruling classes and public opinion.

Two major events had preceded that agreement of the late summer of 1907, an agreement that outlined on the borders of Asia the equilibrium of Europe. These events were almost contemporary and marked the political path in their own way. The first was the Younghusband Expedition, between the end of 1903 and 1904. It was certainly the last great moment of the Great Game and is the background for this short text. The second — although on another geographical front, that of the Pacific — is the Russo-Japanese War which broke out in February 1904 and ended with the humiliating defeat of the Tsar's army the following year. Russia collapsed fighting against a country, Japan, which had been dragged away from its Middle Ages just half a century earlier. The defeat had clearly delineated in London, beyond the limited diplomatic reports, the real strength of that empire that had populated the British political nightmares for almost the entire nineteenth century.

THE BRITISH EXPEDITION AND THE BHUTANESE

Tibet — along with the rest of the Himalayan region — had entered the orbit of the Great Game in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁵ Ruled by the Dalai Lamas,

³ August 18, 1907, according to the Julian calendar in use in Russia until 1918.

⁴ The National Archives, London-Kew (further only TNA), FO 535/10, Enclosure 1 in No. 49, Convention, 18 (31) August 1907, pp. 31–35.

⁵ Before then, the British interest in the Tibet was essentially linked to the possibility of alternative routes to trade with the Ch'ing Empire. In 1842, five Chinese ports trade were opened with the Treaty of Nanking which ended the First Opium War. The British also obtained the island of Hong Kong. Text of the Treaty of Nanking in English and Chinese, with declaration of the Viceroy of India (in English and Chinese translation), in *Treaties, Conventions, etc., between China and Foreign States*, Vol. I, Second Edition, published by Order of the Inspector General of Customs, Shanghai 1917, pp. 351–356. The first British mission to Tibet had been that of George Bogle in the seventies of the eighteenth century, also fundamental in the Anglo-Bhutanese relations. In fact, Bogle negotiated a trade agreement that followed the first agreement of 1774 between the British East India Company and the Druk Desi ('*Brug sde srid*'), the Bhutanese secular head (see N. SINGH, *Bhutan: A Kingdom in the Himalayas*, New Delhi 1972, pp. 30–32 and A. DEB, *George Bogle's Treaty with Bhutan (1775)*, in: *Bulletin of Tibetology*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1971, pp. 5–14; for the texts of the 1774 treaty and the Bogle's agreement see SINGH, *Bhutan*, pp. 177–179). After George Bogle, there were other British missions (see British Library, London (further only BL), IOR/L/PS/20/D4, *Political Missions to Bootan, comprising the reports of The Hon'ble Ashley Eden, -1864; Capt. R. B. Pemberton, 1837, 1838, with Dr. W. Griffiths's journal; and the account by Baboo Kishen Kant Bose, Calcutta 1865; on the relations between Bhutan and neighbouring states see also F. POMMARET, *Ancient Trade Partners: Bhutan, Cooch Bihar and Assam (17th to 19th cen-**



masters of the Gelukpa⁶ school of Tibetan Buddhism,⁷ the country had become part of the Ch'ing imperial system in the first half of the eighteenth century, remaining a distant and almost autonomous periphery of the Manchu power until the collapse of the dynasty.⁸ In 1888 the British were involved in an armed conflict with the Tibetans after the 1886 trespassing of the troops of the thirteenth Dalai Lama Thubten Gyatso⁹ (1876–1933) — then a child — in the territory of the British protectorate of Sikkim. Later, the British reached an agreement with the Manchu authorities concerning Tibet and Sikkim which was signed in Calcutta in 1890.¹⁰ In 1893, that doc-

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- tures), in: *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Summer 2000, pp. 30–53). In the second half of the nineteenth century, in 1864, Ashley Eden was forced to sign a treaty, written in Tibetan, with the Bhutanese, without being able to negotiate the terms. He added the words “*Under Compulsion*” to his signature. The event therefore led to the Anglo-Bhutanese War (1864–1865), which concluded with the Treaty of Sinchula of 1865. Full text of the Treaty of Sinchula in *East India (Bootan)*. *Further papers relating to Bootan*, House of Commons Papers, 13, Vol. LII, London 1866, pp. 94–95. The English translation of the treaty signed by Eden with the Bhutanese is instead available in D. H. E. SUNDER, *Survey and Settlement of the Western Duars in the District of Jalpaiguri, 1889–1895*, Calcutta 1895, pp. 30–31.
- 6 *Dge lugs pa*. I have adopted a phonetic transcription of Tibetan and Bhutanese names. Scientific transliteration is provided in the footnotes and is however used for bibliographic references following the system proposed by Prof. Turrell V. Wylie (see T. V. WYLIE, *A Standard System of Tibetan Transcription*, in: *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 22, 1959, pp. 261–267). In the scientific transliteration, long vowels are indicated by a macron. As for the Chinese language, I have chosen the Wade–Giles transcription system.
- 7 The most recent Tibetan Buddhist school, founded by Tsongkhapa (*Tsong kha pa*, 1357–1419). In Bhutan, the Nyingmapa school (*nying ma pa*) and the Drukpa school (*brug pa*), a branch of the largest Kagyupa school (*bka' brgyud pa*), are widespread. From the Drukpa school Bhutan takes its endonym: Druk-yül (*Brug yul*), i.e. ‘Country of ‘brug pa’, often translated as ‘Country of the thunder dragon’, from the original meaning of the name of the school (see M. ARIS, *The Raven Crown: The Origins of Buddhist Monarchy in Bhutan*, Chicago 2005, p. 24). The school had been founded by Tsangpa Gyare Yeshe Dorji (*Gtsang pa rgya ras ye shes rdo rje*, 1161–1211). On the biographies of the latter see S. KUMAGAI, *Introduction to the Biographies of Tsangpa Gyare (1161–1211), Founder of the Drukpa Kagyu School*, in: S. KUMAGAI (ed.), *Bhutanese Buddhism and Its Culture*, Kathmandu 2014, pp. 9–34. It should be borne in mind that, despite the common Tibetan Buddhist religion, sectarian fractures heavily invested the political space of international relations between Tibet and Bhutan.
- 8 The Manchu dynasty of Ch'ing (1644–1912) was overwhelmed by the Hsin-hai Revolution of 1911 and the Republic of China was proclaimed on January 1, 1912. The so-called Tibetan Declaration of Independence dates back to 1913, while the other great Tibetan Buddhist country, Mongolia, had declared independence in December 1911. In 1914 the statuses of Outer Tibet and Inner Tibet were defined with the Simla Agreement, negotiated but not signed by the representative of the Republic of China, but only by the British and Tibetan delegates. The complete text of the treaty is in: TNA, FO 535/17, Enclosure 8 in No. 231, Convention between Great Britain, China, and Thibet, pp. 262–265.
- 9 *Thub bstan rgya mtsho*.
- 10 *Convention between Great Britain and China relating to Sikkim and Tibet. Signed at Calcutta, March 17, 1890. With Regulations appended thereto, signed at Darjeeling, December 5, 1893*, C. 7312, London 1894, Convention between Great Britain and China relating to Sikkim and Tibet, pp. 1–3.



ument was augmented by the *Regulations regarding Trade, Communication, and Pasturage* which were attached to it.¹¹ From the British perspective, the relationship between the Ch'ing Empire and Tibet was essentially the same relationship that existed between a protecting power and a protectorate. This interpretation, as seen, was formally recognised even in the subsequent Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907. Formally, the British negotiated with Peking those issues relating to Tibet. The agreements, however, were simply ignored by a Tibetan government that was substantially deaf to the requests of the Ch'ing dynasty.¹² In the diplomatic space of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the imperial dynasty claimed to represent the foreign affairs of the Dalai Lama, but lacked any real authority over Tibet. The impossibility of a direct — and therefore potentially effective — negotiation with the Tibetans had therefore pushed the British to a military expedition, led by Francis Edward Younghusband (1863–1942), into the territory of Tibet and that expedition reached Lhasa at the beginning of August 1904.¹³ On September 7, a treaty was signed in the Potala,¹⁴ but the seal of the Dalai Lama was affixed to the text by the regent, alongside the other seals of the Council of Ministers, the three great Gelukpa monasteries and the National Assembly.¹⁵ The Dalai Lama had fled, headed for Mongolia.¹⁶

11 *Convention between Great Britain and China relating to Sikkim and Tibet. Signed at Calcutta, March 17, 1890. With Regulations appended thereto, signed at Darjeeling, December 5, 1893, C. 7312, London 1894, Regulations regarding Trade, Communication, and Pasturage, to be appended to the Sikkim-Tibet Convention of 1890, pp. 3–5.*

12 On June 9, 1894, John Claude White wrote to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division: “The Chinese have no authority whatever here. The Tibetans will not obey them, and the Chinese are afraid to give any orders. China is suzerain over Tibet only in name. This appears to be partly due to the Chinese Emperor always dealing very leniently with the Tibetans, and also that the Chinese have only some 500 soldiers in Tibet, and these are wretchedly armed with old swords, tridents and old muzzle-loading fowling-pieces. They are also without the elements of drill. The Chinese therefore, though rulers in name, have no power and can enforce no order; as an example, the Tibetans were ordered by the Chinese to evacuate Lingtu, but flatly refused to obey the order. This makes negotiation here most difficult, for though the Chinese agree to any proposal, they are quite unable to answer for the Tibetans, and the Tibetans, when spoken to, either shelter themselves behind the Chinese, or say they have no order to give any answer for Lhasa, and can only report. Thus it is absolutely impossible to get at any one, for he simply puts the blame on some higher authority who is not forthcoming. If the Chinese had any real power negotiations would be comparatively easy, as there would only be one power to deal with.”, BL, Mss Eur F197/103, *Papers relating to Tibet*, Cd. 1920, London 1904, Letter from J. C. White, Esq., Political Officer, Sikkim, to the Commissioner, Rajshahi Division, dated Yatung, the 9th June, 1894, (Extract.), p. 30.

13 TNA, FO 535/4, Inclosure in No. 39, of India to Mr. Brodrick, August 6, 1904, p. 77.

14 *Po ta la.*

15 TNA, FO 17/1751, Telegram from Viceroy, 10 September 1904, f. 392; TNA, FO 535/4, Inclosure in No. 82, of India to Mr. Brodrick, September 12, 1904, pp. 137–138; F. YOUNGHUSBAND, *India and Tibet: A history of the relations which have subsisted between the two countries from the time of Warren Hastings to 1910; with a particular account of the mission to Lhasa of 1904*, London 1910, p. 304. Full text of the treaty (English version): TNA, FO 17/1753, *Convention between Great Britain and Tibet*, 7 September 1904, ff. 65–66.

16 On the thirteenth Dalai Lama in Mongolia, see U. E. BULAG, *Introduction: The 13th Dalai Lama in Mongolia, or the Dawn of Inner Asian modernity*, in S. CHULUJUN — U. E. BULAG



It is well known that during the Expedition, the role of main mediator between Tibetans and British was carried out, albeit without an official British mandate,¹⁷ by the Bhutanese nobleman Ugyen Wangchuck,¹⁸ then Tongsa¹⁹ Penlop²⁰ and later monarch of the small Himalayan country, first king (Druk Gyalpo).²¹ Ugyen Wangchuck (1862–1926) had become the main political-military figure of Bhutan following the Battle of Changlimithang in 1885 in which, together with his two main allies — the Paro²² Penlop and Wangdi Phodrang²³ Dzongpon²⁴ — he defeated his opponents, in particular Alu Dorji (d. 1903),²⁵ the then Thimphu²⁶ Dzongpon, and Phuntshok Dorji,²⁷ the Punakha²⁸ Dzongpon.²⁹ Until his accession to the throne, however, some parts

(eds.), *The Thirteenth Dalai Lama on the Run (1904–1906): Archival Documents from Mongolia*, Leiden — Boston 2013, pp. 1–25.

17 Despite the fundamental contribution made by Ugyen Wangchuck during the Expedition, only the Tibetans, in fact, formally recognized him as a mediator (TNA, FO 535/4, Inclosure 2 in No. 22, Mr. Walsh to Colonel Younghusband, June 12, 1904: (A.) Letter from the Dalai Lama to the Tongsa Penlop, sent by Lama Se-kong Tulku, dated April 28, 1904, pp. 45–46 [English translation]; TNA, FO 535/4, Inclosure 2 in No. 22, Mr. Walsh to Colonel Younghusband, June 12, 1904: (B.) Letter from the Thibetan Council (“Ka-sha”), to the Tongsa Penlop, dated January 19, 1904, pp. 46–47 [English translation]; TNA, FO 535/4, Inclosure 1 in No. 14, Mr. Walsh to Colonel Younghusband, June 3, 1904, p. 24). A letter dated May 26, 1904, from the Government of India to Walsh reads: “You should see the Tongsa Penlop, and explain to him that we are, of course, unable to accept him as a mediator between the British and Thibetan Governments. We can only negotiate with the Thibetan Government at the place and in the manner which we have repeatedly indicated. But if the Tongsa Penlop wishes to render his good offices, which we shall appreciate, he should impress on the Dalai Lama the folly and uselessness of resistance. He should tell the Dalai Lama, in reply to his letter, that the British Government have no desire to injure the Thibetans or their country, or to interfere with their religion, but that they insist on a settlement of the differences which have existed for so long. The Dalai Lama has only to send properly accredited Representatives to Gyantse with the Chinese Amban in order to arrive at an amicable settlement and avoid further disturbance and bloodshed. But the patience of the British Government is now nearly exhausted, and if the Dalai Lama fails to send Representatives to Gyantse before the day which has been notified to him the British Government will no longer consent to negotiate there, but will send more troops to protect their Mission, which will advance and compel negotiations at Lhasa”, TNA, FO 535/3, Inclosure 9 in No. 94, Government of India to Mr. Walsh, May 26, 1904, p. 142.

18 *O rgyan dbang phyug*.

19 *Krong gsar*.

20 *Dpon slob*, the governor of Tongsa, literally ‘the lord-master’.

21 *’Brug rgyal po*.

22 *Spa ro*.

23 *Dbang ’dus pho brang*.

24 *Rdzong dpon*, the local governor, literally ‘the lord of the fortress (*rdzong*)’.

25 *A lu rdo rje*.

26 *Thim phug*. The city is today’s capital of the kingdom.

27 *Phun tshogs rdo rje*.

28 *Spu na kha*.

29 On this decisive period in Bhutanese history, see K. PHUNTSHO, *The History of Bhutan*, Noida 2013, pp. 485–492, and J. C. WHITE, *Sikhim & Bhutan: Twenty-One Years on the North-East*



of the Bhutanese territory were not under his direct and full control nor under the authority of his allies or relatives. As we will see in detail, in the Bhutanese West, the area of Haa,³⁰ near the Chumbi Valley, was controlled by the younger brother of his old rival Alu Dorji. Those ancient rivalries and tensions that had continued across the years following the Battle of Changlimithang appeared again, although at an apparently marginal level, even during the Younghusband Expedition. Comparing the military strength of the Tongsa Penlop with that of the Haa Drungpa³¹ clearly explains the Tibetan protection of the latter.³² Through British archival documents, in the following pages, we therefore will reconstruct an attempt carried out by the Bhutanese, during the discussions concerning the Expedition, to try to resolve those ancient questions.

OLD ENEMIES

According to a report³³ sent to Francis Younghusband at the beginning of February 1904, written by Ernest Herbert Cooper Walsh, deputy commissioner at Darjeeling and Assistant Commissioner during the Expedition,³⁴ the old rivals of Ugyen Wangchuck also came into play in the Anglo-Bhutanese discussions, and in particular one old rival, the younger brother of Alu Dorji, the Haa Drungpa. After the defeat at Changlimithang in 1885, both had taken refuge in Lhasa protected by the then Regent, Ngawang Palden Choeki Gyeltshen (1850–1886),³⁵ and by the Amban.³⁶ According to Ugyen Dorji's³⁷ explanation to Walsh,³⁸ the Tibetan government had openly threat-

Frontier. 1887–1908, London 1909, pp. 131–134 and 281. On Bhutanese history, in addition to the aforementioned book by Karma Phuntsho, see also Y. IMAEDA, *Histoire médiévale du Bhoutan: établissement et évolution de la théocratie des 'Brug pa*, Tokyo 2011 and ARIS.

30 Hā.

31 *Drung pa*, 'attendant', a minor local governor.

32 According to data provided by Ugyen Wangchuck and published in 1907, the Haa Drungpa had only 300 men, while 4,000 were under the command of the Tongsa Penlop. The total of Bhutanese forces serving the various local lords was 9,950. *Frontier and overseas expeditions from India*, compiled in the Intelligence Branch Division of the Chief of the Staff, Army Head Quarters, India, Vol. IV (BL Reference: IOR/L/PS/20/B234), North and North-Eastern Frontier Tribes, Simla 1907, pp. 120–121.

33 TNA, FO17/1748, No. 41, E. H. C. Walsh to Colonel F. E. Younghusband, February 2, 1904, f. 250.

34 *The India List and India Office List for 1905*, London 1905, p. 639; YOUNGHUSBAND, *India and Tibet*, p. 152.

35 *Ngag dbang dpal ldan chos kyi rgyal mtshan*.

36 TNA, FO17/1748, No. 41, E. H. C. Walsh to Colonel F. E. Younghusband, February 2, 1904, f. 250. The regent died the following year, in the spring of 1886, BLO BZANG YE SHES BSTAN PA'I RGYAL MTSHAN, *Rta tshag rje drung ngag dbang dpal ldan chos kyi rgyal mtshan gyi rnam thar*, s.l. n.d., ff. 54b–55a.

37 *O rgyan rdo rje*, the right arm of the Tongsa Penlop (also known as Ugyen Kazi).

38 To be precise, in the document it is not entirely clear whether this version was actually explained by Ugyen Kazi to Walsh, since the latter does not explicitly mention him in tell-



ened Bhutan with a war if the two escapees were not restored to their earlier roles.³⁹ Following Ugyen Wangchuck's refusal, a compromise had been reached which included the exile of Alu Dorji and the return to Bhutan of his younger brother, reinstated as Haa Drungpa.⁴⁰ The agreement was reached in Phari,⁴¹ where the representatives of Ugyen Wangchuck had met with "a Depon [sde dpon] from Lhasa and a Chinese Phogpon [phog dpon] from the Amban".⁴² Alu Dorji, who had remained in Tibet, had instead fought on the side of the Tibetans against the British in 1888.⁴³ He died in 1903 in the Chumbi Valley.⁴⁴ Later, in June,⁴⁵ Ugyen Wangchuck, meeting with Walsh in person, faced the question again.⁴⁶ He further clarified the internal political framework of his country and the substantial independence of the Haa Drungpa from the Bhutanese Government: "twenty-two years ago Alo Dorje, who was the then Timpuk Jongpen, bribed a Nyer-pa to murder the present Tongsa Penlop. The Nyer-pa, however, informed the Tongsa Penlop, who went to war with the Timpuk Jongpen and defeated him. The Timpuk Jongpen escaped to Lhasa, and there got the support of the Thibetan Government, who sent an army to Phari with the Rampa Shape, and threatened to invade Bhutan if the Timpuk Jongpen was not received back. The Tongsa Penlop was then in his 25th year, and, according to Thibetan custom, could not, therefore, undertake any enterprise, so was unable to lead an army to oppose the Thibetans, and consequently had to send an Envoy to Phari, and terms were arranged, by which the Jongpens of Gasha, Lingshi, Gokhana, and Ha were appointed by Thibet, and the revenues of those four Jongs were appropriated to them, though the revenues of the districts under those Jongs continued to be paid to Bhutan. Alo Dorje was also not given up, but remained in Thibet and took up his residence at Chumbi, and was one of the Thibetan leaders against the British in the war of 1888. He died at Chumbi last year. The revenues of the three Jongs, Gasha [Mgar sa], Lingshi [Gling bzhi], and Gokhana, were shortly after restored to the Bhutan Government, though they had to retain the Jongpens appointed by the Thibetans, but that of Ha Jong has continued to be col-

ing these events, but presents them as reasons for the request that will be explained in the next paragraph. In any case, it is likely that it was Ugyen Wangchuck's right-hand man who explained the matter to Walsh. This version was then reiterated, as will be seen in the following lines specifically, by Ugyen Wangchuck himself.

39 "They [Alu Dorji and his brother] were defeated and escaped to Lhasa, where they obtained the assistance of the Amban and the Tibetan Government (the then Regent) and the Tibetan Government informed the Tongsa Penlop that unless these two officers were restored to their former posts Tibet would go to war with Bhutan", TNA, FO17/1748, No. 41, E. H. C. Walsh to Colonel F. E. Younghusband, February 2, 1904, f. 250.

40 Ibidem.

41 Phag ri.

42 TNA, FO17/1748, No. 41, E. H. C. Walsh to Colonel F. E. Younghusband, February 2, 1904, f. 250.

43 TNA, FO 17/1108, A. W. Paul to J. Ware Edgar, 25th May 1888, attached to J. Ware Edgar to H. M. Durand, 29th May 1888, No. 128, Enclosure No. 3, f. 123.

44 TNA, FO17/1748, No. 41, E. H. C. Walsh to Colonel F. E. Younghusband, February 2, 1904, f. 250.

45 TNA, FO 535/4, Inclosure 1 in No. 22, Mr. Walsh to Colonel Younghusband, June 8, 1904, p. 43.

46 Ibidem, pp. 44–45.



lected by the Ha Jongpen (or “Tongpa”), who considers himself to be a Thibetan official, and does not pay them to the Bhutan Government, but keeps them for himself”.⁴⁷

Both versions — that of Ugyen Dorji, as well as that of Ugyen Wangchuck — therefore refer to an explicit war threat from the Tibetan government towards Bhutan.⁴⁸ In addition to this, the fortresses of Gasa, Lingzhi and an unidentified “Gokhana” also remained under the control of lords who, although they had renounced direct control over the revenues transferred to the Bhutanese government, had nevertheless been appointed by the Tibetans.

AN ATTEMPT

In the course of discussions with the British, Ugyen Wangchuck had asked them to put it as a condition “in any negotiations with Tibet” that the ancient rival, the Haa Drungpa, “who was appointed by the Tibetan Government against the wishes of the Bhutanese should be removed from his post and be required to leave Bhutan”.⁴⁹ The request was made to Walsh by the end of January, 1904.⁵⁰ According to Ugyen Dorji, who had previously played the role of mediator between Tibetans and British,⁵¹ it had been Alu Dorji himself who had led the Dalai Lama to prevent him from returning to Tibet, “on the ground that he had acted as the Agent and messenger of the British Government”.⁵²

However, the British did not want to be involved, considering it a matter that was limited in scope to the relations between Tibet and Bhutan.⁵³ Walsh wrote to Younghusband: “I informed Ugyen Kazi that as this was purely a matter between Bhutan and Tibet in which the British Government was in no way concerned, it was not likely that the British Government would take any action in the matter”.⁵⁴ Furthermore, Walsh had found

⁴⁷ Ibidem. Ugyen Wangchuck’s explanation was part of a list of three crises between Tibet and Bhutan that the Tongsa Penlop was explaining to Walsh (Ibidem).

⁴⁸ According to another version of the story reported by Zhwa sgab pa dbang phyug bde ldan in his *Bod kyi srid don rgyal rabs*, the Tibetans had successfully mediated at the request of the two Bhutanese factions, without however mentioning the threat of Lhasa: Zhwa sgab pa dbang phyug bde ldan emphasized instead the earlier decision of the Tibetan government to avoid involvement in Bhutanese internal affairs. Obviously, the version narrated by Ugyen Dorji and Ugyen Wangchuck clearly outlines, on the contrary, the non-impartiality of the Tibetan government (ZHWA SGAB PA DBANG PHYUG BDE LDAN, *Bod kyi srid don rgyal rabs*, Vol. II, Kalimpong 1976, p. 84).

⁴⁹ TNA, FO17/1748, No. 41, E. H. C. Walsh to Colonel F. E. Younghusband, February 2, 1904, f. 250.

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹ TNA, FO 17/1508, Political Officer for Sikkim (J.C. White) to the Commissioner, Rajshahi Division, 20th March 1900, f. 248; TNA, FO 17/1508, Simla, Government of India to Lord George F. Hamilton, 25th July 1901, f. 241; TNA, FO 17/1511, Deputy Commissioner Walsh to Government of Bengal, October 22, 1901, f. 98; FO 17/1511, Deputy Commissioner Walsh to Government of Bengal, October 29, 1901, f. 99.

⁵² TNA, FO17/1748, No. 41, E. H. C. Walsh to Colonel F. E. Younghusband, February 2, 1904, f. 250.

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

a way to use the old divisions to his advantage: the brother-in-law of Alu Dorji was in fact a precious source of information from Tibet on Bhutan and on Ugyen Wangchuck himself in the first phase of the Expedition, when the position of Bhutan was still not clear to the British.⁵⁵ And Walsh had known from him, through a Bhutanese soldier of the Paro Penlop in “*Rinchengang*”,⁵⁶ a Tibetan village near the border with Sikkim, “*that there is no collection of soldiers or supplies being made in Bhutan*”.⁵⁷ In addition to this, “[t]he order that each village headman was to have ready 100 arrows and 100 measures (“*Marphus*”) of barley was passed several months ago, but last month the Paro Penlop issued another order on all the Kazis that they are not now to collect from the village headman the arrows or barley, as they are not required ; the reasons being that if they do so it may bring trouble on Bhutan from the British”.⁵⁸

Walsh added in his letter to Youngusband that “[i]f this reason is correct our present occupation of the Chumbi Valley and the consequent fear of Bhutan that we are in a position to enter their country is probably the cause for countermanding the earlier order”.⁵⁹ As for “the stoppage of payment of the annual subsidy of Rs. 50,000”,⁶⁰ the Bhutanese considered this a pretext by the British “and fear war in consequence”, although Ugyen Wangchuck had reassured the population on the question, certain to get the due “after he has had an interview with the British Commissioner”.⁶¹ Although not directly related to the main topic of this paper, this account by Walsh is particularly interesting when compared with another document relating to the Sikkim Expedition of 1888 according to which Ugyen Wangchuck feared losing the allowance paid to Bhutan by the British if he came out in of the Tibetans.⁶² This could have led to think that the loss of the 50,000 rupees annual payment established by the Sinchula Treaty as a purely financial concern to the Bhutanese, a quite relevant issue in itself. However, according to Walsh’s sources,

55 “The brother-in-law of the said Alo-Dorje now resides at Gye-Ling and I am utilising him as a means of obtaining reliable information about Bhutan; as he is now hostile to the Bhutanese and the Tongsa Penlop, and has no object in concealing their intentions or movements”, *Ibidem*.

56 *Rin chen sgang*.

57 TNA, FO17/1748, No. 41, E. H. C. Walsh to Colonel F. E. Youngusband, February 2, 1904, f. 250.

58 *Ibidem*.

59 *Ibidem*.

60 The subsidy was paid by the British to the Bhutanese under the terms of the Treaty of Sinchula of 1865. Full text of the Treaty of Sinchula in *East India (Bootan). Further papers relating to Bootan*, House of Commons Papers, 13, Vol. LII, London 1866, pp. 94–95. As mentioned, the treaty was signed at the end of the Anglo-Bhutanese war of 1864–1865. Article II established the transfer of the Bhutanese southern territories to the British. Article IV provided for “an annual allowance” by the British “to the Government of Bootan of a sum not exceeding fifty thousand rupees (Rs. 50,000), to be paid to officers not below the rank of Jungpen”, according to the following schedule: “On the fulfilment by the Bootan Government of the conditions of this Treaty, twenty-five thousand rupees (Rs. 25,000). On the 10th January following the first payment, thirty-five thousand rupees (Rs. 35,000). On the 10th January following, forty-five thousand rupees (Rs. 45,000). On every succeeding 10th January, fifty thousand rupees (Rs. 50,000)”.

61 TNA, FO17/1748, No. 41, E. H. C. Walsh to Colonel F. E. Youngusband, February 2, 1904, f. 250.

62 TNA, FO 17/1108, Extract from a demi-official letter from Major H. Boileau, 11th August 1888, No. 152, Enclosure No. 1, f. 189.



it seems that it was the political significance of the interruption of payments — and the possible military consequence — that was at the heart of the real Bhutanese concerns, particularly among the population of the small Himalayan state.

The soldier of the Paro Penlop later reported that “*he met at Paro a Kazi and two servants, who informed him that they were returning from Tuna where they had delivered a letter*” from Ugyen Wangchuck to Younghusband.⁶³ Furthermore, the Tongsa Penlop had to go to Punakha “*on the 6th February, where he will take the instructions of the General Council before proceeding*”.⁶⁴ The Paro Penlop was not expected in the capital, but he would be represented by “*an officer*”, on the advice of Ugyen Wangchuck himself: “[t]his he is said to have done under instructions of the Tongsa Penlop, that it is not necessary for him to come personally, as the Tongsa Penlop will see him at Paro on his way through”.⁶⁵

CONCLUDING REMARKS

“*The game is so large that one sees but a little at a time*” Mahbub Ali explained to young Kim during the monsoon holidays from the St Xavier’s School of Lucknow.⁶⁶ The negotiations over the Haa Drungpa occupied a very brief moment in the most complex negotiations affecting the political space of the Himalayan region, but also of the whole of Asia, during the Younghusband Expedition. It was a small attempt by Ugyen Wangchuck to also involve the British in the internal dynamics of Bhutan.

However brief, the issue helps us to better understand some questions. In the first place, the documentation helps to delineate more clearly the territorial and power structures within Bhutan in the years preceding the birth of the monarchy under the Wangchuck dynasty. It is possible to better measure the strength and weakness of the authority of the Government of Bhutan in a relevant part of western Bhutan, in strategic districts along the Tibetan border and with local lords that were Bhutanese, but still old or former enemies of Ugyen Wangchuck and, substantially, of direct Tibetan appointment. The fact that Ugyen Wangchuck required the intervention and support of the British to remove only one of the nobles appointed by the Tibetans — and not the others — may lead to the hypothesis that the real political problems for the future monarch were found only in the Haa region. Indeed, as seen, only Alu Dorji’s brother still did not openly accept the authority of the Government of Bhutan. Ugyen Wangchuck may have taken advantage of Alu Dorji’s recent death to ask for British help for a final blow against his opponents in that region.

Focusing on the British side, their refusal to intervene can in turn be analysed in a double interpretative key. On the one hand, there was the need not to further complicate the attempt to negotiate with the Tibetans. On the other hand, however, British neutrality in Bhutanese affairs was still evident at the beginning of 1904. This was despite the experience of 1888, in which, as we have seen, Alu Dorji had fought against

63 TNA, FO 535/2, Inclosure 11 in No. 36, Mr. Walsh to Colonel Younghusband, February 2, 1904, p. 81.

64 Ibidem.

65 Ibidem.

66 R. KIPLING, *Kim*, Garden City, New York 1912, p. 208.

the British, while Ugyen Wangchuck had tried to act as a mediator between Tibet and the British.⁶⁷ It should be remembered that even in September 1903, in the weeks immediately preceding the Younghusband Expedition, there had been great uncertainty in the British ranks about the position of the Bhutanese leaders.⁶⁸ The role of Ugyen Wangchuck, and, to a lesser extent, of his cousin, the new Thimphu Dzongpon, during the Younghusband Expedition helped to definitively clarify to the British the real closeness to the British Crown of this part of the Bhutanese noble world and in particular of the Tongsa Penlop and therefore the good faith of the Government of Bhutan.⁶⁹ A political and human closeness that then led, in 1910, to the signing of the Treaty of Punakha.



⁶⁷ On the Bhutanese role, see M. MIELE, *The British Expedition to Sikkim of 1888: The Bhutanese Role*, in: *West Bohemian Historical Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2018, pp. 199–213.

⁶⁸ On September 26, 1903, Younghusband had written to the Government of India: “PLEASE refer to paragraph 11 of my letter dated the 9th September, your letter dated 15th September, and to Bengal Government’s telegram of the 24th, saying that Bhutanese were suspected of an inclination to join Thibet. I think the Bhutanese should be induced to declare their intention, for, if they are approached now, we ought to be able to get them on our side, for they have to fear our stopping their subsidy and also attacking them with the troops soon to be assembled in Sikkim. I would, therefore, suggest that proposal of Lieutenant-Governor, Bengal, in the Bengal Government’s letter dated the 22nd August, that Bhutanese officials be invited to meet the Commissioner, Rajshahi, to discuss reconnaissance road to Chumbi Valley be adopted. Both Parr and Montague, Manager Bengal-Duars Railway, are confident that a practical road up Ammo Chu might be made. Walsh’s information regarding this route is not reliable, and when he speaks of a pass only 6,600 feet high between Di Chu and Ammo Chu, he is apparently mistaking a pass across a spur for one across the main range. I am not in favour of sending native surveyor to examine these routes, for the information he would bring back would be indecisive, but I recommend sending O’Connor up the Di Chu and over the watershed to Assamese Dolam, and then down the Ammo Chu, a reconnaissance which need not last more than fourteen days. I urge this matter because I find that Walsh, as well as everybody else knowing this frontier, says that the Chumbi Valley must be the real route to Thibet, and to get to Chumbi we must find some better way than over the Jelep-la, and avoid waste of money on mere temporary roads. It would pay us to subsidize the Bhutanese well to give us the use of this route, and, if adroitly managed, this might be the means of gaining them over to our side—like the Nepalese. Maharajah of Cooch Behar has privately expressed his opinion that Tongsa and Paro-penlos would be only too glad to fall in with views of British Government if matters were properly represented to them”, TNA, FO 535/1, Inclosure 1 in No. 7, Colonel Younghusband to Government of India, September 26, 1903, p. 6.

⁶⁹ “Before leaving I expressed to the Tongsa Penlop the great pleasure this meeting with him had afforded me. He had impressed me with the conviction, which I would report to his Excellency the Viceroy, that the Bhutanese Government sincerely desired the friendship of the British Government. I congratulated him on their wisdom in adopting such a policy, and I assured him, on behalf of the Viceroy, that all we desired was to be on friendly and neighbourly terms with States like Bhutan and Thibet lying on our frontier” Younghusband wrote to the Government of India on June 13, 1904. If not an official mediator for the British side, Ugyen Wangchuck had now become a valuable adviser: “I asked the Tongsa Penlop to often write to me and give me advice regarding the settlement with Thibet”. In this way Younghusband closed his letter: “The Tongsa Penlop fervently assured me of the goodwill of the Bhutanese Government, and said they would never depart from their friendship with the British Government”. For the full text of Younghusband’s letter: TNA, FO 535/4, Inclosure 3 in No. 22, Colonel Younghusband to Government of India, June 13, 1904, pp. 47–48.