

REPAYING A 'DEBT' WITH LAND, GRAIN AND TAXES:
YUG PHYOGS THUB AND HIS SERVICE TO BHUTAN DURING
THE SINO-NEPALESE WAR¹

SAUL MULLARD
Namgyal Institute of Tibetology
Gangtok, Sikkim

INTRODUCTION²

This paper presents two notification permits (*lag khyer*) issued, during the height of the Sino-Nepalese War, in the years 1790-1791 by Bhutanese authorities, granting Yug Chogthub Barfungpa (Yug Phyogs thub 'Bar spungs pa) rights and privileges in Bhutanese territory. They can be found in the Sikkimese Palace Archives now housed in the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology under the catalogue numbers PD/9.5/005 and PD/9.5/007.³ They bring to light several things unrecorded in the conventional historical works of Sikkim and Bhutan and which complicate our understanding of Sikkim-Bhutan relations in this period. In particular they provide evidence that suggests Bhutan did not remain entirely neutral during the Sino-Nepalese Wars and that the Sikkimese General Chogthub had been instrumental in quashing an internal rebellion in Bhutan.

This paper explores those two issues by presenting the two documents in translation (edited transliterations and facsimiles appear in the appendix to this paper) and by placing them in their political-historical context. The paper then continues with a short commentary

-
- ¹ I would like to thank Tashi Densapa, Director NIT, Dr Anna Balikci-Denjongpa for their assistance during my time in Sikkim. Thanks to Dr John Ardussi for some useful comments regarding the documents in this text and special thanks to my close colleague Dr Hissey Wongchuk. The research was funded by the Leverhulme Trust (UK) and I would like to thank Bridget Keer and Jean Cater for their help and assistance during the two years of this project. Whilst I am always grateful to those who have contributed comments and suggestions to this paper, all errors remain my own.
- ² For the ease of the reader all Tibetan names have been phoneticised in text with transliterations (Wylie) in brackets at the first occurrence. In the translations of the documents all Tibetan terms, names and otherwise appear in transliteration.
- ³ There is a third document which is similar in content to the two published here in the Sikkimese Palace Archive, file number PD/5.5/001, which will be published at a later date.

on the two documents highlighting the usefulness of archival materials for historical studies generally and for the relationship between Sikkim and Bhutan in particular.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND¹²

Sikkim, Vijaypur and the Gorkha Kingdom of Nepal

The Sikkimese General and later Chancellor (*phyag mdzod*) Yug Chogthub was, possibly, the most important Sikkimese military official of the eighteenth century, if not the entire history of the Namgyal dynasty. His birth and early life remains unknown, though we know from fragmentary Sikkimese sources such as *The testimony of the Barfung clan* (Palace Archive document number PD/9.5/003 and hereafter *Testimony*),⁴ a text which spans almost a hundred years of the history of the influential Lepcha Barfung ('Bar spungs) family, that he was a son of the famous Chancellor Gawang (Ga dbang is referred to as Kawang in *The History of Sikkim*). 'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs (hereafter BGR), which is more commonly known by its English title of *The History of Sikkim* (HoS) and which is the first point of reference for those studying Sikkimese history, is also an important but inconsistent source for the study of Chogthub's life. The first reference to him in that work appears on page 46 of the British Library edition of the typescript and page 112 of the 2003 Tibetan edition, where he is referred to by his Nepali alias i.e. Satrajit for his seventeen victories over the Gorkha army.

As a son of the Sikkimese Chancellor Gawang, Chogthub was born into the Barfung clan, which had ruled Sikkim directly since the 1740s. In that period members of the Barfung clan placed, with Bhutanese and Tibetan assistance, the puppet king Namgyal Phuntsho (rNam rgyal phun tshogs c.1733-1780?) upon the throne after a prolonged civil war known as the Second War of Succession (see Mullard 2013: 181-184 for details). In the intervening years the Barfung family had extended its influence to the North Bengal plains and what is now Eastern Nepal. It was through its support of Buddhi Karna Sen, Chancellor of Vijaypur, and his coup to remove the king of Vijaypur, Kama Datta Sen, in 1769 (Shamsher and Bikram 1966: 60-65 and *Testimony*) that Sikkim became drawn into the political conflicts of Eastern Nepal. In particular, it was the murder of King Kama Datta Sen by Buddhi Karna Sen which provoked his cousin and King of Nepal, Prithvi Narayan

⁴ This document is due to be published in a paper by the current author in 2015.

Shah, to order an invasion of Vijaypur with the intention of destroying Buddhi Karna Sen (Acharya 1973: 82). This compelled the Sikkimese to protect their interests in Vijaypur and necessitated direct conflict with the Gurkhas.

Chogthub began his career as the joint leader (with his elder brother rNam rgyal tshe ring) of the Sikkimese force in the Limbuwan-Gorkha War (1771-1774). During that campaign he fought in the Battle of the Arun in 1774, known in Nepalese sources as The third battle of Chainpur, to protect Barfung influence over Vijaypur, the annual tribute from the Limbu Chieftaincies, and their control of Ilam established during the reign of the first Sikkimese king, Phuntshog Namgyal (born c.1604). The defeat of the Limbus, the fall of Vijaypur and the signing of the Limbu Gorkha treaty of 1774 forced Buddhi Karna Sen into exile in Sikkim (Acharya 1973: 85) and Sikkim lost its influence in the area between Lingtum⁵ and the Kankai River (*Testimony*: 132-133).

Acharya then claims that shortly after the fall of Vijaypur in July 1774, Ilam was voluntarily ceded to the Gorkha commander Abhiman Simha Basnyat by Sikkim, once Basnyat had written to the king of Sikkim, demanding the extradition of Buddhi Karna Sen (*ibid.*). Yet he himself notes that there was some delay before Ilam was finally annexed to Nepal. The death of Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1775, may well be the major cause of this delay indicating that the Sikkimese throne was in no hurry to cede that territory and casting considerable doubt over the voluntary nature of the loss of Ilam. Indeed in Sikkimese sources it notes that a year after the fall of Vijaypur a border settlement conference was held between representatives of Tibet, Nepal and Sikkim in Walung. A treaty settling the Sikkim-Nepal border at the Kankai River was signed on the 13th day of the sixth month of the Wood Sheep year: 15 July 1775 (HoS: 47).⁶

That date is more or less confirmed by Nepalese sources, though they indicate that Tibet and Nepal were the chief signatories (Pradhan 1991: 127). In addition the *Testimony* recalls a more likely series of events in which it notes that shortly after the signing of this treaty limiting Sikkimese influence in the east of the Kankai River region, the Gurkhas invaded and seized lower Ilam (*Testimony*: 134). Indeed, so frustrated were the Sikkimese with this development, that they

⁵ Lingtum here should not be confused with Lingtam in Sikkim as it refers to Lingam on the banks of the Arun tributary of the Sapta Kosi River in Eastern Nepal.

⁶ The calculation of the western date is based on the tables found in Schuh 1973 [2012]: 428.

requested Tibetan mediation, who in turn responded by contacting the Gorkha demanding compensation of 100 *dharni* of gold (equal to 227 kg)⁷ as per the rules of the Wood Sheep year treaty. The demand was ignored (*Testimony*: 134-139).

It is not clear what happened in the years immediately following the loss of Ilam in 1775 (HoS: 47) as both Nepalese and Sikkimese sources are silent. *The History of Sikkim* does mention that another conflict broke out after the loss of Ilam in which a leader (Pradhan identifies him as a Magar commander in the Gorkha forces) named Purna Ale⁸ invaded Sikkim as far as lChags khung, near modern Namchi, before being repelled by Tshangs rin 'dzin Brag dkar pa (HoS: 47). This, however, seems to be an error as according to other sources such as *Testimony* and document YA8 of the Brag dkar Collection (published in Schuh 1978), these events occurred in the Earth Monkey year i.e. 1788 and not the Wood Sheep year (1775) as it was part of the attack on Sikkim during the Sino-Nepalese Wars (see below).⁹

The confusion lies in the fact that *The History of Sikkim* treats the various conflicts between Sikkim and various forces from what is now Eastern Nepal and North Bengal as a conflict between the 'nations' of Sikkim and Nepal and that these various conflicts were a single episode. Whereas a study of other sources shows that there were, at least, two separate events with very different motivations. In the first series of conflicts in 1769-1775 military action against Sikkim by different forces from what is now Eastern Nepal was motivated by Sikkim's involvement in the political affairs of Vijaypur and the Limbu regions and as such were influenced by the concerns and political desires of local leaders (included those of Bhutan), whereas the campaign starting in 1788 was linked to concerns which sparked the Gorkha-Tibet Wars of 1788-1790 and 1791-1792 (hereafter collectively referred to as the Sino-Nepalese War).

To simplify, the main issues that ignited conflict between Nepal and Tibet were; 1) the intentional devaluation of Tibetan coins minted in Kathmandu; 2) Gorkha desire to control and monopolise trans-

⁷ This weight is currently valued at \$8.8 million.

⁸ Purna Ali (Purna Ale) is referred to by Nagendra Singh as a Magar commander in the Gorkha army (1997:161).

⁹ See also Mullard 2003: 60. In which the following quote is given: *When in the times of the sde pa Tshangs rin 'dzin in the sa sprel year [1788] Gorkha troops attacked and in the times when the troops of the Iho 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* (YA8 lines 12-13).

Himalayan trade; and 3) High trade taxes and tariffs imposed on Tibetan traders in Nepal. Sikkim and Tibet had signed a trade agreement in 1784 which effectively a) diverted trade from Nepalese routes to the Chumbi Valley thus avoiding Nepalese taxes and tariffs and b) weakened Nepal's attempts to monopolise Himalayan trade (Mullard 2003: 59, and Pradhan 1991: 130-131). This treaty combined with the Sikkimese king's unique and historical diplomatic relationship with the Tibetan government, meant that Sikkim soon became embroiled in this conflict. Indeed one of the first battles of this conflict occurred in Sikkim when a two-pronged attack was launched by, the above mentioned, Purna Ale and one Johar Singh, who was the son of the famous Gorkhali general Kehar Singh Basnet and the Subba of Morang at the time (Pradhan 1991: 132). In 1788 Purna Ale launched a pre-emptive attack on Sikkim through Ilam and up to Namchi, whereas Johar Singh invaded from his base at Vijaypur. By 18 September 1788 Johar Singh had captured the Sikkimese Palace of Rabdentse (Rab brtan rtse), causing the flight of the royal family and disorder in Sikkim.

The likely reason for this attack on Sikkim was to knock Sikkim out of the war early so that the main force could invade Tibet without having to fight on an eastern front to protect its flank. Admittedly this strategy was initially successful as not only was the Sikkimese capital of Rabdentse occupied but also one of its leading generals, Tshangs rin 'dzin Brag dkar pa, died in battle, leaving the Sikkimese military severely weakened. Yet in the following year Chogthub had regrouped and led an army largely composed of Bhutanese soldiers to lay siege to the palace and eventually forced Johar Singh to retreat back to Vijaypur. According to *Testimony* Chogthub and his younger brother killed both Purna Ale and Johar Singh whilst they were retreating, though this cannot be verified in other sources.

Sikkim and Bhutan

The Barfung family, like Sikkim as a whole, has had a mixed relationship with their Bhutanese neighbours. The hostility between Sikkim and Bhutan began in the early eighteenth century when, following the death of the second king of Sikkim (Tensung Namgyal born 1646 reigned c.1670 – c.1699), a war over the Sikkimese succession broke out. The second king of Sikkim had married three women, one from Tibet, one from Limbuwan, and one from Bhutan. Pendi Wangmo, a daughter from Tensung Namgyal's Bhutanese wife,

sought to take the Sikkimese throne with the military support of a Bhutanese force. This brought her into direct conflict with Prince Chagdor Namgyal, the son of the Tibetan wife. The Bhutanese invaded Sikkim around 1700 and captured the palace, whilst the prince fled into exile in Tibet. In the process Yugthing Arub (the great-grandfather of Chogthub), who had facilitated the flight of the prince, was captured by the Bhutanese and imprisoned in Bhutan. By the 1740s, however, the relationship between the Barfung and the Bhutanese had shifted once more when the Sikkimese Chancellor Garwang, the grandson of Arub, had formed an alliance with Bhutan to suppress the Second War of Succession and position his candidate on the Sikkimese throne. In return the Bhutanese were granted local tax rights in Gangtok, where they stationed a small garrison (Ardussi 1977: 539 and Phuntsho 2013: 330).¹⁰

This period of peace was short lived. According to *Testimony* in their attempts to gain influence in Vijaypur the Barfung and Bhutanese were soon on opposing sides in the conflict between King Kama Datta Sen of Vijaypur and his Chancellor Buddhi Karna Sen. This resulted in a temporary loss of tribute from Vijaypur up until the murder of King Kama Datta Sen in 1769. Whilst tribute payments resumed, both the role of the Barfung and Buddhi Karna Sen in the assassination had reached the ears of Privity Narayan Shah. Bhutan, on the other hand, had relinquished its claim over Vijaypur in 1772 and the Bhutanese Regent sDe srid bSod nams lhan grub (more popularly known as Desi Zhidar), who, according to Karma Phuntsho, was a divisive figure in Bhutanese history, formed an alliance with the Gorkha Kingdom (Phuntsho 2013: 367). Desi Zhidar was both directly and indirectly the cause of several internal rebellions in Bhutan from the 1770s-1790s.

THE DOCUMENTS

PD/9.5/007

Recently, regarding whatever such assistance and protection [given] successively by word, thought, and deed, to the Bhutanese *Chos rje* by the Chancellor Phyogs thub, father and son, has been reviewed. For example, upon hearing the news of the internal rebellion in Rin spungs

¹⁰ Interestingly the enumeration of the taxpayers of Gangtok were included in the 1747 coronation document which the coronation gifts to 'Jigs med grags pa; a synopsis of which appears in an appendix to John Ardussi's thesis (1977: 536-539). See also Ardussi 2011 for an overview of Sikkim-Bhutan relations from the seventeenth century.

(Paro), without regard for life or limb [he] came, and, thinking himself only a mere servant, and with selfless devotion [he] restored peace. Because of such actions, the Emperor and the Dalai Lama, in order to arrange the collection of food and to set the quantities for the sustenance of Phyogs thub, gave voice to the following. The trapper of the above mentioned lord is permitted to reside in India for some years and from Ramring Phyogs thub is permitted to collect the summer taxes, winter taxes, grains and produce harvested from the flood plains including whatever measures (*sha li*)¹¹ of unhusked rice that can be afforded; and he is allowed to go without any disturbance and restrictions to the plains in the winter season for the purpose of conducting trade. In addition once all his Bhutia, Lepcha and Limbu subjects who came down to 'Dam sang, rDar ling, gSang sbas and rDzong gсар etc. have been enumerated by Phyogs thub, if they are settled it is necessary that all of them are certainly given over to the lord and heir.¹² Whilst Phyogs thub resides in Kalimpong and until he goes back to Sikkim, it is necessary to supply the chancellor with, from rDar ling kha and within five actual months,¹³ expenses for clothes at the prevailing rate; within four months the Tibetan taxes, two portions of food, and to satisfy his life two bamboo containers of fish, a single *khal* of purified butter and whatever type of Tibetan or Indian salt measuring 15 *bre*. Just as it was written in the red seal of the sovereign, regarding [the place] called Ri nag grung,¹⁴ the District lords, the stewards etc. all the high and low subjects must follow, without error and partiality, whatever Yug Phyogs thub commands in addition to the actual contents of this communication, which has been issued as a certificate of permission (*lag khyer*) [to him] by the great government. Issued from the Bhutanese Rin spungs [Paro], on the noble day of the 3rd day of the 11th month of the Iron Dog year (1790).

PD/9.5/005

Not only in former times but also recently the *Chos rje* received steadfast and sufficient support from Yug Phyogs thub father and son at

¹¹ This likely refers to a unit of measurement used in Bhutan. According to data collected by John Ardussi, one *shali* is equivalent to one *'bre*

¹² The indication here is not that these people are physically handed over to the lord, rather the *'phrod* [*pa*] i.e. the receivables (taxes and services) should be submitted to Phyogs thub.

¹³ Compare *zla lnga la* with *ngo zla lnga la*. The latter, in my opinion, makes explicit that the payment should be made within five actual months of the document rather than by the fifth month of the year.

¹⁴ This is the region around modern Rhenock in eastern Sikkim.

the battle ground. Thereafter, the Gorkhas being consumed by desire for the Hidden Land (of Sikkim) caused [his] exile from the country and whilst depending [only] upon the adherence to the dual traditions of Bhutan [with] continual virtue and sincerity. In this year he [Chogthub] was in Phag ri district in the territory of the Tibetan government when an account of the grievous [situation] was dispatched in a letter. At that tumultuous time when there was conflict in Ringpung (Paro), without caring about his life he defended Ring spungs. As soon as peace was concluded, Phyogs thub asked whether [he] would be allowed to stay in Kalimpong so as to take care of his subjects that reside there. And he requested that he be able to rule whatever people who fled from Damzang and Darling regions [during the war]. [Lacuna 18 syllables]. The king has, for a few years, granted and placed part of the plains estate of Ram lteng under Phyog thub's authority, so as to provide for his livelihood, whilst [he] resides in the private plains estates of the king. So whilst Phyog thub continues to reside in Kalimpong, the summer and winter taxes, and the grains taxes from this estate in the plains, as per the previous tradition, can be collected by Phyogs thub. [...unclear sentence] During the long winter trade on the plains nobody, whether they be high or low, can cause [him] disturbance on the road.

During the Gorkha war, The Sikkimese people fled from the Sikkimese regions to Damzang, gSang sbas, rDha ling [lacuna 17 syllables]. After Phyogs thub has completed the examination of the commoners and traders, those commoners who are under his authority should be identified and those people remaining [who are not under him] should be returned back to their original places. Also the high and low officials of rDar rdzong have to abide by the commands and, without hindrance, do whatever is beneficial. As Phyogs thub resides in Kalimpong and is unable to return to Sikkim within the tenth month items from sGar rdzong should be given to him and after 15 months one *khal* of Tibetan rice, the two types of food, two bundles of fish, one *khal* of butter, 15 *bre* of either Indian or Tibetan salt should be given to Phyogs thub. The Tibetan government have endowed Phyogs thub with the Ri nag [estate] and made the resolution that whilst Yug Phyogs thub cannot return to Sikkim, and for the time being, no new appointments to Ri nag can be made from Dhar rdzong. The Bhutanese Chos rje has ordered that it is obligatory to follow the above authorization, until it is possible for Phyogs thub to return permanently to his own land, and that, in the meantime, all others are forbidden from that appointment at Ri nag. This decree was virtuously issued from the Bhutanese palace of

bKras shis chos gling on the x day of the x month of the Iron Pig year (1791).

COMMENTARY

The role of Bhutan in the Sino-Nepalese War, particularly the alliance between Nepal and Bhutan at that time, is briefly discussed in Karma Phuntsho's recent book *The history of Bhutan*. This alliance was largely regarding Sikkim. Particularly, the Gorkhas wanted to prevent Bhutan from exercising, what Phuntsho surprisingly calls, its "claim of suzerainty" over Sikkim after a Gorkha invasion (Phuntsho 2013: 367-368).¹⁵ More critically put, the Gorkhas didn't want Bhutan to aid Sikkim in the event of an invasion. Nepal did indeed invade, as noted above, causing the flight of the Sikkimese royal family and a prolonged war with Nepal. Bhutan, according to Phuntsho, was not involved in the war except to provide "humanitarian aid of rice, tea and 1,200 silver coins" to the king (ibid.).

In a book, the size and scope of Karma Phuntsho's, it is difficult to present a detailed account of every event in the shared history of Bhutan and Sikkim. Instead a detailed picture of this period can only really be achieved through the analytical study of primary sources, which in Tibet and the Himalayas normally come in the form of administrative materials.¹⁶ The documents presented above do not, of course, provide a definitive understanding of Bhutan-Sikkim relations in this period; but they do present information that can contribute to our wider knowledge of the events and connections between the Sikkimese and Bhutanese: information which otherwise would have been overlooked if relying upon more conventional historical works. In addition they also provide important contextual information relevant to later periods of Sikkim's history, which may help us move away from a state centric interpretation of events. An important example is the series of border conflicts between Bhutan and Sikkim in the nineteenth century over the possession of Rhenock (Ri nag), which is understood

¹⁵ It is surprising that Phuntsho (2013: 368) states uncritically that Bhutan had a historical claim of suzerainty over Sikkim. The diplomatic and political relationship between Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan was incredibly complicated and as such it is very difficult to maintain the use of language, which brings to mind a relationship of vassalage.

¹⁶ The dependence upon secondary sources such as biographies (*nam thar*), local chronicles (*lo rgyus*) or histories (*rgyal rabs*), whether compelled by a lack of other sources or otherwise, has often meant that Tibetan historical research has often lacked the approach to source criticism more commonly found in other fields of history.

in texts like *The History of Sikkim* ('*Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*) as a conflict between states. This contrasts with the information found in the documents above which indicate that one of the causes of the disputes likely resulted from the individual acquisition of a temporary land grant, which, we know from other sources, became inherited and permanent. In addition the documents show that there was no problem with granting a piece of land to a person who, in later times when the concepts of territoriality and the emerging national character of the state became intertwined, may well have been defined as 'foreign'.

The documents provide two major reasons for the benefits being granted to Chogthub. Firstly, both documents highlight a rebellion in Paro (Ring spungs). According to both documents as soon as Chogthub heard of this conflict he came to Bhutan and suppressed the uprising. Whilst the documents lack details on both who led the uprising and what the main causes were, it seems likely, given the history of Bhutan at that time, that the rebellion was related to one of the conflicts initiated by followers of the former Bhutanese Desi Zhidar. Phuntsho has noted that after Zhidar had been removed from the office of Desi in 1773 a number of violent insurrections led by his supporter occurred in 1773, 1775 and 1783 (2013: 352 and 370). Whatever conflict Chogthub may have been involved in, it is clear that both documents claim that the benefits that he received from Bhutanese regions were repayment for his service to Bhutan during the Ringpung rebellion. Secondly, they both indicate that a communication was received from Tibet. In PD/9.5/007 this letter was written in the name of both the Emperor of China and the Dalai Lama, whereas PD/9.5/005 notes that it originated from the Tibetan government. That document also details that this letter related to the grievous situation of the Sikkimese caused by the Gorkha invasion of Sikkim, the first document is less explicit. Both documents, though they differ in the details, agree that the two major reasons for issuing Chogthub with certificates of authority were his service during the Ring spungs rebellion and the receipt of a communication from Tibet.

The benefits granted to Chogthub can be divided into two main types. The primary benefits include minor supplies for his sustenance whilst he resided in Kalimpong, specifically measured amounts of food and clothing (rice, fish, butter and salt). As far as we can tell, as it is not clear when in 1791 PD/9.5/005 was issued, he was granted these foodstuffs annually in 1790 and in 1791. The secondary benefits are more substantial. He is granted with freedom to move between Kalimpong and the plains; authority over all Lhopo, Lepcha, and

Limbu subjects who had settled in the main regions around Kalimpong ('Dam sang, rDar ling etc); tax collection and trade rights from, as well as authority over, the plains estates of Ram ring/Ram lteng; and, perhaps, most importantly his endowment of the Rhenock estate by the Tibetan government was endorsed by Bhutan. The last being particularly important as whilst Rhenock may have been considered by Tibetans as a part of Tibet it was effectively, given its proximity to the Bhutanese stronghold of 'Dam sang near Kalimpong, controlled by Bhutan from at least the 1740s onwards.

Interestingly, Kumar Pradhan remarks that the Rhenock spur was granted to Sikkim in the early 1770s when a treaty was negotiated between Sikkim and Bhutan, after a Bhutanese force found themselves surrounded by the Sikkimese military when attempting an attack on Vijaypur (Pradhan 1991: 111). He goes further to remark that Rhenock was in fact annexed by Bhutan from Sikkim in 1706, presumably as part of the First War of Succession. Unfortunately Pradhan does not refer to a source of evidence for these two statements. For whilst it may have been the case that Rhenock was granted to 'Sikkim' around 1770, his statement regarding the Bhutanese annexation of the same in 1706 cannot be accurate. For if we accept the statement in the collective works (comprised around 1735) of Jigme Pawo ('Jigs med dPa' bo) that the Bhutanese invaded Sikkim, during the First War of Succession, from Sa ljongs we must likewise conclude that Rhenock, which lies to the east of Sa ljongs, would already have been under Bhutan prior to the invasion of Sikkim in around 1700 (JPKB: 51). At close inspection of the usual sources it is clear that Pradhan was relying upon the English typescript of BGR (compare Pradhan 1991:111 to HoS British Library edition: 45) and I have yet to find any credible source verifying the details of that particular event. That being said, given the geographical location of the Rhenock range, which marks the current border between not only Sikkim and Bhutan but Tibet as well, it was an area of conflict between the two countries and it is not inconceivable that it may have, at different times, been under the authority of all three countries. In any event the gift of Rhenock to Chogthub in 1791 marked a significant concession, for not only was it a sensitive region because of its position on the border lands but also because it was located upon the trade route to Jalep La.

Given the value of this grant as well as the other benefits granted to Chogthub by the two *lag khyer* they cannot really be regarded as part of the humanitarian aid noted by Phuntsho (2013: 368). Firstly, these benefits were not issued to the Sikkimese king – indeed the Sikkimese

king is conspicuous in his absence in the two documents – but were instead granted to the leading Sikkimese military commander of the period. Secondly, Chogthub was granted full control of all Sikkimese people in Western Bhutan. Of course we do not know who these people were; they could have equally been refugees as they could have been soldiers in his army. Either way they could have provided an additional source of revenue and potentially a source of military personnel. Thirdly, he was granted tax collection rights and authority over estates on the plains. It is likely that these particular benefits were of considerable value, if the Bhutanese plains were as fertile as the Sikkimese plains estates were in the 1840s.

Records of tax revenue from the Sikkimese plains estates in the 1840s show a pre-expense annual income in excess of Rs. 26,000 which, when adjusted on the basis of nominal GDP inflation, amounts to Rs. 32 million today (see PD/1.1/040 as noted in Mullard 2013: 195-196). The figures in that document are for a combined plains region of seven identifiable estates and two unidentifiable places, whereas Chogthub was only granted at the most two estates, though only one of those (Ram Iteng) can be identified with any degree of certainty. Ram Iteng is probably modern Ramsai, which is located on the flood plains between the Jaldhaka and Tista Rivers in the Maynaguri Block in Jalpaiguri District. Although the name is slightly different from that found in the Tibetan texts, PD/9.5/007 does locate the estate on the flood plains and given that most of the region to the west of the Tista was probably under the control of those allied close to the Gorkhas and that Bhutan and Nepal agreed the Tista as their common border it seems likely that the estate given to Chogthub would be to the east of the Tista.

Much of the flood plain regions of what are now upper Jalpaiguri were originally part of Baikuntapur – the ancestral lands of the Raikat rulers of Jalpaiguri, a scion of the Narayan family who ruled Koch (Cooch) Bihar. Yet by the time these documents were issued the northern flood plains were at least legally under Bhutanese authority. The brief history is that in 1772 this family had allied with the Bhutanese to attack Koch Bihar proper, before the British intervened and established a protectorate over both the Raikat and Cooch Bihar (Hemanta Kumar Rai Barma, 1988: 5 – 6). In the process Bhutan lost the northern floodplains and it was not until 1777 that this region of modern Jalpaiguri District was restored to Bhutan by the Dinajpur Council (Phuntsho 2013: 361).

Unfortunately tax records for this area are not currently available for this particular estate. We do know that from 1772 the Raikat paid an annual tribute to the British agent in Rangpur of Rs. 30,000 (Ray 2013: 30) or around Rs. 37 million at today's value and that at least until 1777 this included the estate of Ramsai. Of course a single estate in the north of Jalpaiguri would not account for that figure no matter how fertile it might be. Instead and until more reliable records come to light we can only rely on comparable data from estates to the west of the Tista.

As was noted above the combined revenue for the seven identifiable estates and two unidentifiable places amounted to Rs. 32 million at today's value but there was a considerable range in the annual income of the individual estates: the smallest identifiable estate (that of Naxalbari) only produced annual revenues of Rs. 224,000, whereas the largest and most fertile estate (that of Panisali) produced Rs. 5.1 million. The figure for Naxalbari is unusually low as the other six identifiable regions produced figures in the millions. The two unidentified places also produced more revenue, though not by much, at Rs. 294,000 and Rs. 629,000 respectively (PD/1.1/040 lines 2-11). The median income of all nine regions is that of Ranibun (modern Ranidanda), on the western floodplains of the Mahananda, at a figure of Rs. 1.8 million.

Whilst we cannot say with certainty what the annual value of the Ramsai estate given to Chogthub was, it is possible to infer from the above figures of the estates on the western side of the Tista River that it is not unlikely that estates like Ramsai on the eastern side of the same river would be commensurate in value. Assuming that to be the case it is likely, given the figures above, that the grant of the estate of Ramsai was not of inconsiderable value.

This of course raises the question of why such a valuable gift would be granted to Chogthub. If the documents above are to be believed these gifts were both in payment for services rendered to the Bhutanese during the rebellion of Ringpung and a response to a request for assistance originating in Tibet. There are two other possible reasons for Bhutanese assistance to Chogthub. It could be likely, given that most of Sikkim west of the Tista had been occupied by Gorkha forces, that Chogthub occupied, along with his army, the region to the east of the Tista: an ideal location from where he could launch attacks into Sikkim, but technically safely within the borders of Bhutan. With the occupation a *fait accompli* the Bhutanese had no choice but to confirm his possession of the region as a face saving measure. In this scenario

the Bhutanese are essentially passive and given the history of Sikkim and Bhutan seems improbable. A more likely case is that the Bhutanese granted Chogthub control over the regions of Kalimpong, Rhenock and Ramsai as a way to help support the Sikkimese war effort without violating the letter (but not the spirit) of the 1788 neutrality agreement with Nepal. In part this would have, likely, resulted from pressure from Tibet and China; but to identify the same as the sole reason for providing such financial assistance to Chogthub, would be to devalue both the role of domestic politics in Bhutan as well as Bhutanese ‘foreign policy’ interest in the process. As far as the latter is concerned the reasoning is simple: Bhutan would prefer a weaker neighbour like Sikkim over an expanding one like Nepal. The former is a more complex but was likely connected to Chogthub’s role in quashing the Ringpung rebellion, as mentioned in both of the documents above.

FINAL REMARKS

Whilst the two documents presented in this paper raise more questions than they answer, they also provide valuable insights into the relationship between Chogthub Barfungpa and the Bhutanese authorities. In the first instance they highlight the fact that Bhutan’s role during the Sino-Nepalese Wars cannot be limited to humanitarian assistance as the value of the support given to Chogthub was substantially more than that recorded in other sources. This in turn, together with the evidence for Chogthub’s activities in quelling the Ringpung rebellion in Bhutan, suggests that the relationship between Sikkim – or at the very least a man who was fighting for the survival of Sikkim as a kingdom – and Bhutan is more complicated than secondary sources like BGR would have us believe. In such historical works, the past is understood from a national or at least quasi-national perspective, whereas the examination of primary sources such as the two in this paper suggests that such a perspective is not always relevant. The gift of Rhenock, parts of Kalimpong, and the Bhutanese Indian estates to a man actively pursuing the liberation of a rival kingdom serves as an important example of that fact. It is this man and his activities that these documents also illuminate, and this cannot be overlooked for whatever reasons that the lands and taxes were granted it is perhaps important to remember that they were granted to a single man. A man who, perhaps as a result of this assistance, managed to keep Sikkim in this war and eventually regain much of the territory lost to the Gorkhas.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Tibetan language sources

- (BGR) Chos rgyal mthu stobs rnam rgyal dang Ye shes sgrol ma. 2003. *'Bras ljongs rgyal rabs*. Gangtok, Sikkim, The Tsuklakhang Trust.
- (JPKB) Lha btsun 'jigs med dpa' bo C.1735 *rig 'dzin 'jigs med dpa' bo'i bka' 'bum/* dbu med printed edition, Gangtok: Gangtok Palace. Copy received from Dr. Melanie Vandenhelsken.
- (PD/1.1/040) Tax Records for the Indian plains estates in the Wood Snake Year 1845. The Sikkimese Palace Archives house in the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok file number PD/1.1/040.
- (Testimony) The Testimony of the Barfung clan. 1819. The Sikkimese Palace Archives housed at the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok file number PD/9.5/003.
- (PD/9.5/007) Notification permit issued to Chogthub Barfungpa 1790. The Sikkimese Palace Archives house in the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok file number PD/9.5/007
- (PD/9.5/005) Notification permit issued to Chogthub Barfungpa 1791. The Sikkimese Palace Archives house in the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok file number PD/9.5/005
- (PD/5.5/001) Notification permit issued to Chogthub Barfungpa 1791. The Sikkimese Palace Archives house in the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok file number PD/5.5/001

Western language sources

- Acharya, Baburam. 1974. "War with Sikkim and the Chaubisi States" *Regmi Research Series* 6 (9 and 10) 177-180 and 190-195.
- 1973. "The Annexation of the Sen Kingdoms" *Regmi Research Series* 5 (4): 81-86.
- Ardussi, J. 1977. *Bhutan before the British: A historical study*. Unpublished PhD. Thesis at the Australian National University.
- 2011 "Sikkim and Bhutan in the Crosscurrents of 17th and 18th Century Tibetan History" to be published in McKay and Balikci-Denjongpa (eds) *The Proceedings of the Golden Jubilee conference of Namgyal Institute of Tibetology*.
- Mullard, S. *in press*. "An introduction to the 'Testimony' of the Barfung ('bar spungs) clan: An important source for the study of Sikkim's social and political history" in Czaja, O and Hazod, G. *Studia Tibetica*.
- 2013 Recapturing Runaways or Administration through contract: The 1830 Covenant on Kotapa tax exiles. In Ch. Ramble, P. Schwieger and A.

- Travers (eds) *Tibetans who escaped the historians net: studies in the social history of Tibetan societies*. Kathmandu: Vajra
- Shamsher, P and Bikram, N. 1966. *Pyasi* Chapter IX: "Kirat Sen Rajyahaaruko Unmulan." (Annexation Of The Kirat Sen Kingdoms): Kathmandu.
- Phuntsho, K. 2013. *The History of Bhutan*. Noida: Random House India.
- Pradhan, K. 1991. *The Gorkha conquests: the process and consequences of the unification of Nepal, with particular reference to eastern Nepal*. Calcutta: Oxford University Press.
- Rai Barma, H. K. (trans) 1988. *The Royal History of Cooch Behar: Book of facts and events* Translated from "Kochbiharer Itihas", 2nd edition (1988). Online accessed 17 October 2013.
http://coochbehar.nic.in/Htmfiles/history_book.html
- Ray, S. 2013. *Transformations on the Bengal Frontier: Jalpaiguri 1765-1948*. London: Routledge
- Schuh, D. and L. S. Dageyab. 1978. *Urkunden, Erlasse und Sendschreiben aus dem Besitz sikkimesischer Adelshauser und des Klosters Phodang*, St Augustin: VGH Wissenschaftsverlag.
- Namgyal, T and Dolma, Y. 1908. *The History of Sikkim* (English). Gangtok, Sikkim: unpublished typescript. British Library edition (London).

APPENDIX: TRANSLITERATIONS AND FACSIMILES

PD/9.5/007

1. da lam_ phyag mdzod phyogs thub pha bu'i skor la snga phyi rim par sgo gsum tha dad nas re ltos skyabs 'jug sogs gang yang
2. chos rje 'brug par tshol zhing_ de ma zad rin spungs nang zing skabs kyang gnam thod¹⁷ pa'i med la lus srog tu ma ltos par
3. 'ong ste phyag mchi¹⁸ bsam pa lhag med kyis khus¹⁹ pa'i yag gso bcas la_ gong sa rin po che nas kyang spyang rgyangs brtse gzigs chen
4. pos phyogs thub pa'i zad gos²⁰ kyi thun 'debs dang_ lto thus bcas la gong zhabs kyis²¹ sger rgya sngon rgya gar lo khi sdod_ skul [?] kyi ram
5. ring gyi zur rgya de nas_ dbyar khral dang_ dgun khral_ 'bru dang_ gyam²² dngos po ci 'byor shal li chum bcas phyogs thub rang
6. gis 'sdus chog pa dang_ dgun gyi dus su rgya phyogs tshong 'grul byed par yang ched phra du nas kyang lam rgya med par 'gro chog
7. pa dang_ 'dam sang_ rdar ling_ gsang sbas_ rdzong gsar phyogs gang du_ kho pa'i mi ser_ lhogs²³ pa_ mon pa_ tsong yur
8. pa sogs babs pa tsi²⁴ yod kyang lhag med phyogs thub rang nas tsad²⁵ gcod byas rjes_ yin pa nges 'grongs²⁶ sa yin tsho yod ris lhag med
9. nar bdag por²⁷ 'phrod²⁸ nges sprod dgos rgyu dang_ phyogs thub pa ka len spur gnas te 'bras ljongs su ma log bar ngo zla lnga la rdar
10. rdzong nas lo gos phyag mdzod rang la gla gnyer thang²⁹ dang_ zla bo 4 la bod kyi khral_ phyogs thub rang lto gnyis skal_ sro³⁰ brgyags
11. nya sbal ril 2 dang_ mar khu shel khal re_ tsha bod tsha dang rgya tsha gang rung bre 15 bcas byin dgos rgyu dang_ ri nag grung zer ba
12. de yang gong sa'i dmar tam du 'khod pa ji ltar dang_ gzhan yang phyag mdzod phyogs thub kyi rims pa³¹ gang yang gzhung sa chen po nas lag
13. khyer du gnang ba'i dan khra 'di don la rdzong bdag_ gnyer pa sogs che phra kun nas spang glangs³² 'chugs med du yod pa gyis_ zhes
14. lcags khyi zla 11 tshes 3 bzang por 'brug rin spungs nas dge

¹⁷ thos

¹⁸ pyi

¹⁹ gus

²⁰ zas gos

²¹ kyi

²² Abr. gyam kha: flood plain

²³ lho

²⁴ ci

²⁵ tshad

²⁶ grong

²⁷ This should probably read nor bdag por i.e. to the heir (cf. PD/9.5/005 line 14).

²⁸ Khral?

²⁹ This phrase is similar to gla thang which means "the prevailing rate of fees/fares/wages" cf. Goldstein: 209 entry for gla thang.

³⁰ srog

³¹ In this case this is clearly an archaic form of 'brims pa; i.e. to hand out/distribute

³² blang

PD/9.5/005

1. da lam_ yug phyogs thub pha bu 'di dag snga nas kyang chos rje khrug sar skyal sdeng khrong zhus pa ma tshad_ rje su sbas gnas kyi chags rkyen lta bus
2. gor snying gis yul thon byung ba nas bcas[?] kha zhe med pa'i blo 'phral phug dge 'brug bstan pa gnyis su [?] gzung ba'i blo gtod ring_ 'di lor kho rang phag
3. rir khul du dga' ldan gzhung sar zhu yig gi lam nas bslab don zhus te {'dudza?} dus kyang_ ring spungs zing rkyen skabs shar dus pa kyags? stabs su lus brag
4. la ga bltos pa'i kha zhe med pa'i phyag gyir rgyur thag zhu khul zhig dang_ zing rkyen zhi 'phral phyogs thub rang zhabs 'jags kyiis zhu sbyor la de sa
5. rang gi mi ser yod ri kyi 'tsho skyong dang bcas ka len spur sdod chog pa_ 'dam tshang_ sdar ling gi cha khul kho rang gi mi ser lti? yod? yul thon gyi
6. ris kyang slar bdag 'dzin byed chog pa zhig zes zhu nan che bas_ lta bzhig gang bshad ldad? {lacuna±18}
7. gshis lto brgyags kyiis 'tsho thabs la_ zhabs pad rang gi sger rgya sngon rgya gar lo khi sdod shul gi ram lteng gi zur rgya der da lta ga rgyam zhabs pad nas bskos
8. gnang bzhig bzhag pa de rang dang_ phyogs thub sa ka len spur nam gnas bar du_ rgya gzhi de nas dbyar khral dang dgun khral_ 'bru khral_ gyam dngos po
9. zhi 'byor dang shal li'i chum? sngar lugs bzhin phyogs thub pas? rgyugs chog par bkrin bskyangs yod_ sgr'i gzun dang gyur la tshong khe spo yang ba rgyal ba? bded song gnyis?
10. rgya phyogs su tshong 'grul byed par_ dbyar sgang la lung pa spyi thog nas tshong 'grul? byed mi chog pa de rang la cha gnas dgos pa dang_ dgun tshong ring rgya phyogs su tshong
11. 'grul lam gang der byed chog par che phra su nas kyang lam 'gag rgya sdom med par btang chog_ gor kha'i khyur zing skabs 'bras ljongs 'di sa'i cha khongs nas
12. yul thon gyi ring gyi thor rjong gsar dang 'dam tshang_ gsang sbas_ rdha ling? gsang brgyag? {lacuna ±17} tshong mur gyi mi ser bcas pa
13. babs sdang? yod kyang che gra gang yang lhag med phyogs thub rang nas rtsad gtso byas rjes_ dengs rang gi mi ser yin nges gdon mthong nges shes 'grongs ris lhag
14. med nor bdag po'i lag sar 'phrod pa byas sprod dgos rgyur_ rdar rdzong sa dang 'di gnyer sogs las tshan che phra gang nas kyang bka' la gnas te rnyad gtsor med
15. pa'i thog_ grogs ram ci? phan la 'bad dgos rgyu dang_ yang phyogs thub pa ka len spur gnas te 'bras ljongs su phyir log ma byung bar_ ngo zla bcu? {lacuna+4} sgar
16. rdzong nas lo gos phyogs thub rang la bla gnyer thang dang_ zla bo bco lnga la bod gras? khyal_ phyogs thub la khro gnyis skal dang_ sro brgyags nya bhal ril gnyis
17. dang mar khu shel khal re_ rgya tsha bod tsha gang rung bre bco lnga bcas byin dgos rgyu_ gzhan yang ri nag spung sa zer ba de yang da thugs la dge 'brug ?
18. gnyis nas spung bya sa re de ltar yin byung_ dga' ldan gzhung nas ri nag de phyogs thub par gnang 'dug pa dang brgyun_ phyogs thub pa slar 'bras ljongs su ma log
19. bar Dhar rdzong nas spung gsar bskos byas mi chog par re zhig mdzad yod_ phyogs thub kyang slar rang gnas tshangs su tshud pa byung ba nas btsam re ri nag spung
20. sa de'i bsko bzhag chos rje 'brug pa rang gis snga krol ltar byas pa las gzhan gyis byed mi chog pa'i bka' khra lcags phag zla tshes la 'brug bkris chos kyi
21. pho brang nas bris pa dge

