

(21) byas pa che ba cha gcig dang chung ba cha bzhi bcas bskur yod pa de mo ho thog thur sprod (22) dgos pa dang de mtshungs rje btsun dam pa ho thog thu'i sprul skur dogs gnas yod pa (23) da lta khyi'u⁹ gnyis rtsas¹⁰ yod 'dug pa sngar lam chos 'don thog ming byang bum nang du dkrugs (24) pa'i gtan 'khel byung bstun gser snyan su sgron dgos rgyur nges pa gnyis zhes spyi phebs (25) byung ba bka' don bzhin gnas tshul du bskur.

III TRANSLATION

The subject of this letter from the great minister of the Grand Council¹¹ to Shis and Ko,¹² the great ministers resident in Tibet:

According to the supreme order dated the 21st day of the seventh month of the 21st year of the reign of bCa Chin (Chia Ch'ing)¹³ with reference to the report to the throne by Zal-'phrung-a and his colleague,¹⁴ acknowledgment is made of the submission to the effect that the Pan-chen Er-ti-ni¹⁵ and the De-mo Ho-thog-thu¹⁶ each offers a scarf of felicitation and an antique image in gratitude for their pleasure at the pacification of the strife between the Gor-sha¹⁷ and the Phe-reng.¹⁸ The purport of the orders to be communicated by Shis Ming and Ko Hri to the Pan-chen Er-ti-ni and the De-mo Ho-thog-thu is, in short:

"Apprehending that there might be strife and disturbance in the region of sTod on account of hostility between the Gor-sha and the Phe-reng, both being people from beyond the frontier, I commissioned a great

⁹ (23) *khyi'u* for *khye'u*.

¹⁰ (23) *rtsas* for *btsas*.

¹¹ (1) Cun-ci blon-chen. Perhaps the principal minister of the Chün-chi ch'u 軍機處, the Emperor's Grand Council.

¹² (1) Hsi Ming was Amban at Lhasa 1814-17. Ko Hri (Kao?) Ming was apparently his assistant.

¹³ (2) 12 September 1816.

¹⁴ (2) Zal-'phrung-a can. *can*, "together with". Cf. the next line where it is used as the equivalent of *dang bcas*; also *khad* (*khyad*?) *can nas* in line 6 of the text: "by you both" and line 13 *kho-pa-can* "they both". No one is specifically named as the colleague of Zal-'phrung-a (Sai-chung-a); the reference may be to the senior ambassador.

¹⁵ (3) Pan-chen Blo-bzang bstan-pa'i nyi-ma, 1781-1854. Er-ti-ni: Mongol *erdeni*: "jewel" = Tibetan *rin-po-che*.

¹⁶ (3) Blo-bzang 'jigs-med rgya-mtsho, the second De-mo Rin-po-che to hold the office of regent which he did from 1811 to 1819. Ho-thog-thu: Mongol *qutuytu* "holy" = Tibetan *'phags-pa*.

¹⁷ (3) Ch'ien Lung's inscription on the Gorkha war of 1792 has *Gor-kha*; but *Gor-sha* appears in another inscription at Lhasa dated 1794.

¹⁸ (7) *Phe-reng, phe-rang*, "Feringhi, Frank, foreigner", appears at least as early as 1733, probably having reached Tibet via Nepal. The other name applied to foreigners, e.g. the Capuchin missionaries in documents of 1724, was *mgo-dkar*, "white-head". *Phe-reng* seems later to have given way to *phyi-gling* "foreign country (man)", the usual Lhasa pronunciation of which - "P'i-ling" rather than "chi-ling" - suggests a popular etymology of the older word.

general together with officers and an army to protect and secure the frontier. In consequence, the people of both countries, being unable to endure their acute fear, made submission acknowledging their offence. In just the same way, in the time of my late father the Emperor Ka'u Tsung Zhun¹⁹ Hong Til,²⁰ when the Bal-bu²¹ and Gor-sha made war they were unable to endure their terror; even so when I too despatched a general and an army the people could not bear our splendour and they submitted to our commands. And so, since all was entirely due to the grace of my late father, in order to show gratitude for such kindness the Lamas should make a particular effort in the performance of religious services for the peace and prosperity of their country.

"And I have sent separately a large scarf, a string of prayer-beads of yellow *sbe-a-shis*,²² a white jade snuff bottle, a cloud-patterned jade cup, a large pair of Chinese bags with yellow tassels and four smaller pairs, to be respectfully presented to the Pan-chen Er-ti-ni; and a large scarf, a string of *Bu-dhi-rtsi* prayer-beads, a white jade snuff bottle, a cloud-patterned jade cup, a large pair of Chinese bags with yellow tassels, and four smaller pairs, to be presented to the De-mo Ho-thog-thu.

"And further, now that two boys have been born who are thought possibly to be the reincarnation of the rJe-btsun Dam-pa Ho-thog-thu, you must make sure that after customary prayers, slips bearing the names shall be shaken in the vase and the precise result reported in a petition to the throne."

This instruction is sent in accordance with the terms of the supreme order.

IV

The events with which the Grand Council's despatch is principally concerned are mentioned by Alistair Lamb in *Britain and Chinese Central Asia*, London, 1960 (pp. 39-48) and by J. Pemble in *The Invasion of Nepal*, Oxford, 1971 (pp. 342-4). Still more recently, in *Nepal, a Strategy for Survival*, Berkeley, California, 1971 (pp. 75-95), it has been examined by Professor Leo Rose whose lucid and authoritative account throws fresh light on the affair by drawing extensively on Nepalese sources. For the summary that follows I have consulted the above-named works and also the East India Company's records in the India Office Library.

The Chinese established a connexion with Nepal in 1792 when the famous expedition of Fu-k'ang-an, by way of Tibet and across the Himalaya

¹⁹ (11) Kao tsung Ch'un: the dynastic name of the Emperor Ch'ien Lung.

²⁰ (11) Hong til'. *til'* is perhaps in error for *ti'*.

²¹ (11) Bal-bu, *bal-po*. If this is intended to refer to Nepalese other than the Gorkhas, i.e. the Newars, it is misleading; the Newars took no part in the fighting in 1792.

²² (16) *Sbe-a-shis*, elsewhere *shi'-ya'-shi*, is explained as a precious stone of "blue-green cloud-colour"; perhaps here it is some variegated hard-stone.

to within a few miles of Kathmandu, inflicted punishment on the Gorkha for their rapacious incursions as far as Shigatse.

The British in India were drawn marginally into those events. Since 1760 they had been more or less warily seeking to resolve the conflict between the expansion northwards of the ambitions and influence of the East India Company and the southward drive of the ebullient Gorkha kingdom. The threat from Fu-k'ang-an's army scared the Gorkhas into appealing for help to the British whom they had previously kept at arm's length. The Governor-General, Lord Cornwallis, to whom the Tibetans had also appealed, took the opportunity to conclude a commercial treaty with Nepal; but anxiety to avoid Chinese hostility and consideration for the recent, tenuous relationship between the Company and Tibet restricted his intervention to an offer of mediation which came too late to be of any use. So, the Gorkhas, after a humiliating reverse, had to acknowledge themselves as tributaries of the Chinese Emperor. In practice that meant little beyond sending a mission to their distant suzerain every five years and avoiding any further trouble with Tibet. It did not prevent them following up the agreement of 1792 with the British by another treaty in 1801. That was merely an expedient forced on them by a domestic dilemma. It did nothing to remove the underlying hostility and was never fully honoured. After its termination in 1804 increasingly bitter competition for disputed border areas culminated in 1814 in a British invasion of Nepal.

The Nepalese promptly and repeatedly appealed to China, representing the British threat to themselves as aimed ultimately at Tibet. Professor Rose's account shows that the Chinese had no intention of being drawn into the quarrels of their nominal vassal and made it clear that they did not even care if the Nepalese submitted to British rule provided there was no foreign intrusion into Tibet. The Governor-General, Lord Moira, who had no inkling of so unsympathetic an attitude on the part of the Chinese, was apprehensive that they would be seriously disturbed by the fate of their tributary. He, therefore, made arrangements, late in 1815, to inform the Ambans at Lhasa of his intentions towards Nepal. Before any answer was received the Treaty of Segauli in March 1816 ended a year-and-a-half of muddled and incompetent campaigning in Nepal.

Soon after that a vague communication from the Ambans suggested that they were indifferent to what the British might do in Nepal and that it was not worth bringing to the notice of the Emperor. Nevertheless, the Emperor had been informed and, although determined not to be led into a dangerous and expensive adventure on behalf of the Nepalese, he was sufficiently concerned to send a general with a small force into Tibet to find out what was going on across the border. The general was Sai-chung-a, the Zal-'phrung-a of our document, who was, as Professor L. Petech has kindly informed me, a well-known Manchu official of the day.

En route to Tibet Sai-chung-a learned that the war between the Nepalese and the British was over; but when he reached Lhasa, in May 1816, he wrote to the Governor-General enquiring about his actions which, he thought, must have been misrepresented by the Nepalese. A suitable reply was sent from India in due course.

To the Nepalese Sai-chung-a sent a stern reprimand, threatening them with severe punishment if they had lied, assuring them that they would get no help from China, and summoning them to send a delegation to offer an apology and to resume payment of tribute.

The Nepalese, smarting under the imposition of a British representative at Kathmandu by the treaty of Segauli, did their utmost to turn events to their advantage and to secure his removal. Their tactics were to mislead the Chinese about British intentions and the British about those of the Chinese who, they said, were indignant at the British invasion of Nepal and were about to assert their authority by themselves sending troops there. To the Chinese they kept up their allegations that the British were aiming at Tibet.

Although the recently arrived British representative at Kathmandu, Colonel Gardner, was not wholly taken in, reports of the presence not far from the border of the Chinese General Shee Chan Choon – as he is called in British records – with a force variously estimated at between 10,000 and a more probable 2,000 did appear a serious danger. The Governor-General, anxious to avoid trouble with China, had given orders that Gardner was to return to India if it came to fighting between the Nepalese and Chinese; but British anxiety was relieved and Nepalese intrigues suffered a set-back when the former received a friendly communication from Sai-chung-a and the latter a peremptory and threatening summons to appear before him at Shigatse.

The Nepalese probably did not feel nearly so much apprehension about Chinese intentions as they had pretended to the British but there was now nothing they could do except send a delegation to pacify the Chinese and at the same time to continue to press their case against the British.

The interview took place late in September 1816 and there is a fascinating eye-witness report to Colonel Gardner from a Ladakhi Muslim merchant who was at Shigatse. In formal and public audience the Nepalese were soundly scolded and told they were rascals who had brought trouble on their own heads. One of the delegates was trembling the whole time but another appeared quite unabashed; and the party had no hesitation in asking for a letter to make the British withdraw their representative from Kathmandu. Although in public Sai-chung-a refused to listen to their requests he later gave them a present of 10,000 silver coins and did, in fact, write to the British explaining that the Gorkhas had apologized and asking that, in the interests of friendly relations, the mission at Kathmandu might be withdrawn.

In reply Lord Moira, while assuring the Chinese that his representative would not interfere in Nepalese internal affairs, agreed to withdraw the mission provided the Chinese were themselves ready to appoint an officer at Kathmandu to control the Nepalese. That suggestion seems to have been earlier in the air for it is mentioned in the eye-witness account of the interview at Shigatse. The faint embarrassment underlying the rather haughty rejection by the Chinese of that offer was not caused intentionally and was perhaps not even perceived by the Governor-General. British policy then and for some years to come was influenced by fear of the damage to their trade in China that might result from annoying Peking and by an out-of-date and exaggerated estimate of the ability of the Chinese to exercise again in central Asia the power and prestige they had formerly displayed there.

Even after the successful campaign in 1792 Chinese representation at Kathmandu – let alone direct administration of Nepal – had been dismissed as impracticable. Things in China under Chia Ch'ing were not what they had been under his father the Emperor Ch'ien Lung; and Sai-chung-a was neither authorized nor adequately equipped to invade Nepal. Even his most threatening communications to the Nepalese speak of his readiness to withdraw his army as soon as he received an adequate apology. It must have given the Nepalese some amusement that the approach of their delegation to Shigatse caused near panic among the Chinese force when a soldier raised the alarm that an army of 30,000 was bearing down on them.

Sai-chung-a and his troops returned home in 1817 and that was the end of an affair which seems to have left little impression on the minds of the Tibetans who were probably well aware of the extent of which each side was play-acting. Professor Petech, whose knowledge of Tibetan and Chinese sources for the period is unrivalled, informs me that in the biography of the fourth Panchen Lama there is a reference to *Zal cang cun* – “General Sai”: but the incident is not mentioned in the excellent history of Tibet by W. D. Shakabpa.

The date of the despatch from the Grand Council is the equivalent of 12 September 1816. As it took not less than a month for messages between Lhasa and Peking, the letter from Sai-chung-a to which the despatch refers, must therefore have been written in August while he was still uttering threats to the Nepalese and well before he had secured their submission. His expedition had, of course, no part in ending the war between the British and Nepalese which was over long before he reached Tibet; and to compare it with the achievements of the great Fu-k'ang-an is a rather ridiculous example of the fustian grandeur in public pronouncements at which the Chinese excelled.

Although the Chinese appear to have been better informed about British intentions than the British were about theirs, their attitude may have been based on broad general assumptions rather than precise knowledge;

and one may ask whether they clearly identified the *phe-reng*, to whom reference is made in the Grand Council's letter, with the British whom they knew in Canton. A report by Fu-k'ang-an and Sun Shih-i after the Gorkha war of 1792, quoted by S. Cammann in *Trade Through the Himalayas*, Princeton, 1951, pp. 140-1, suggests that at that time little was known about the various races of European and nothing at all about “the Calcutta tribe” who had shown interest in Nepal. But Hu-t'u-li, the Amban whom Thomas Manning met at Lhasa in 1811, appears to have had a specific knowledge and dislike of the English with whom he had been unpleasantly involved during his earlier service at Canton – perhaps in connexion with the activities of Admiral Drury in 1806. There is also mention in W. C. Boulger's *History of China* (1894) of an edict of c. 1807 in which English, French, and Portuguese are differentiated. Ignorance of the distinctions among “outer barbarians” was, perhaps, to some extent a bureaucratic pose which it was feasible to maintain at least until 1842; but it is possible that there was genuine uncertainty about the identity of those foreigners who were active along the southern borders of Nepal.

The last part of the letter from the Grand Council refers to the appointment of a successor to the fourth incarnation of the rJe-btsun dam-pa Hutuktu, the principal lama of the dGe-lugs-pa sect in Mongolia, who had died in 1811. The Emperor was anxious to enforce the procedure laid down by Ch'ien Lung, after the Gorkha war of 1792, for determining the reincarnation of high lamas by ceremonially drawing the name of one of several candidates out of a golden vase which he had presented. The order had been ignored by the Tibetans, at the first opportunity, when discovering the ninth Dalai Lama in 1808 and it was important for the Chinese to make sure that it was observed in this instance.

According to Timkowski in his *Travels* (1827) the new rJe-btsun dam-pa, then aged about 7, arrived at Urga in 1819 from Tibet. His name, as is known from other sources, was Blo-bzang tshul-khrims 'jigs-med. Timkowski's remark that the Chinese Emperor had taken the Dalai Lama's prerogative of choosing candidates for the succession, although a misunderstanding of the way in which imperial influence was exercised, suggests that the Emperor had had his way and that use had been made of his golden vase. The Tibetans, nevertheless, when in 1822 it came to finding a successor to the ninth Dalai Lama who had died in 1815, saw to it that, despite Chinese manoeuvring, they got the child of their own choice.

Although the letter as a whole has no striking historical importance, it is interesting as a rare example of an original missive from the Chinese court to the Tibetan Government.