

Ladakhi and Bhutanese Enclaves in Tibet*

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Introduction

Until the 1950s both Ladakh and Bhutan governed small enclaves of territory in Western Tibet. Ladakh's enclave consisted of the village of Minsar (Men ser), near lake Manasarovar (Ma pham), and its surrounding land, while Bhutan governed the Darchen (Dar chen) Labrang and several smaller monasteries and villages near Mount Kailas (Gangs rin po che, Ti se). These enclaves were entirely surrounded by the territory of the Dalai Lama, but Ladakh (superseded by the government of Jammu and Kashmir after 1846) and Bhutan continued to raise revenue there for some 300 years.

The status of these enclaves was ambiguous. By the 20th century both Kashmir/India and Bhutan claimed to hold their lands in full sovereignty. By contrast the Lhasa government acknowledged that Ladakh/Kashmir and Bhutan held certain rights, but it nevertheless tried to exercise its own authority as though the enclaves were no more than foreign-owned estates in Tibetan territory. These disputes were never fully resolved but came to an abrupt end in the

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1950s when the Chinese government took over both sets of enclaves, without paying compensation either to Ladakh/Kashmir or to Bhutan.

This paper is a preliminary discussion of the ambiguities surrounding the enclaves. It begins with an analysis of their common origins in the 17th century, and then discusses the disputes surrounding them in the 20th century, making particular reference to British records.¹ The paper concludes with a discussion of the enclaves' standing in the wider context of traditional and contemporary Himalayan politics.

Origins

Both sets of enclaves share a common origin in that they date back to the period when the Kings of Ladakh controlled the whole of Western Tibet (Mnga' ris skor gsum). The link with Bhutan arises because of the Ladakhi royal family's association with the Drukpa Kagyupa ('Brug pa bka' rgyud pa) sect. This association dates back at least to the end of the 16th century: in 1577 King Jamyang Namgyal (Jams dbyang rnam rgyal, r. c.1595-1616) of Ladakh, who stood in a priest/patron relationship with the Drukpa leader Padma Karpo (Padma dkar po, 1527-1592), sponsored the building of a tantra school on his territory.² The Drukpa school also established close links with Zangskar, which was subordinate to Ladakh, in the same period.

¹ To my knowledge, the Bhutanese archives on this topic still await scholarly research.

² For a discussion of Ladakh's early links with the Drukpa sect see Schuh, Dieter (1983), *Frühe Beziehungen zwischen dem ladakhischen Herrscherhaus und der südlichen 'Brug-pa Schule* (Archiv für zentralasiatische Geschichtsforschung, Heft 2, Sankt Augustin, VGH Wissenschaftsverlag; Schuh, Dieter (1983), "Zu den Hintergründen der Parteinahme Ladakh's für Bhutan im Kreig gegen Lhasa", in *Recent Research on Ladakh*, Detlef Kantowsky and Reinhard Sander (Eds.), Munich: Weltforum Verlag, pp. 37-50.

In the early 17th century, the Drukpa Kagyupa split because of a dispute over the reincarnation of Padma Karpo. The two rival candidates were Pagsam Wangpo (Dpag bsam dbang po, 1593-1641) who belonged to the 'Phong rgyas noble family; and Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (Zhab drung Ngag dbang rnam rgyal, 1594-1651?) the abbot of Ralung (Rva lung) monastery, which lies to the east of Gyantse. The ruler of Tsang (Sde rid gtsang pa) decided in favour of Pagsam Wangpo, forcing Ngawang Namgyal to flee to the south. The Zhabdrung united the whole of what is now Bhutan under a single authority and is regarded as the founder of the Bhutanese state.³ The Zhabdrung established himself as the head of the Lho 'brug or southern branch of the Drukpa Kagyupa. Druk Yul ('Brug yul), the indigenous name of Bhutan, alludes to its association with the Drukpa Kagyupa.

The Kings of Ladakh maintained contact with both the northern and the southern branches of the Drukpa Kagyupa.⁴ Stagtsang Raspa Ngawang Gyatso (Stag tshang ras pa ngag dbang rgya mtso, 1574-1651), who was associated with the northern branch, became the foremost teacher of King Sengge Namgyal (Seng ge rnam rgyal, r. 1616-1642), and founded the monasteries of Hemis (Gsang snags chos gling), Chemre (Theg chog) and Wanla (De chog rnam rgyal). However, Stagna (Stag sna) monastery which was founded in circa 1580 was affiliated with the southern branch, and the King maintained close personal contact with the Zhabdrung. Sengge Namgyal's brother, Prince Tenzin⁵ (Bstan 'dzin), went to Bhutan and rose to become the governor (*rdzong pon*) of Wangdi Phodrang

³ For the history of Bhutan see *inter alia* Aris, Michael (1979), *Bhutan: The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*, Warminster: Aris and Phillips; Aris, Michael (1994), *The Raven Crown: The Origins of Buddhist Monarchy in Bhutan*, London: Serindia Publications.

⁴ Schuh (1983).

⁵ The name would be pronounced 'Standzin' in Ladakh.

(Dbang 'dus pho brang). In 1639 Standzin helped defeat a Tibetan army at a battle at Punakha in Bhutan.⁶

Sengge Namgyal's territories in Western Tibet included the area surrounding Mount Kailas which had long associations with the Kagyupa. These date back to the time of Milarepa who is said to have engaged in a magical contest with the Bonpo master Naro Bonchung for authority over the sacred mountain. It was finally decided that the one who reached the summit of the mountain first on the 15th day of the month would be the victor. Naro Bonchung began ascending the mountain before dawn, but Milarepa overtook him using his robes as wings and reached the summit as the first rays of the sun appeared.⁷ The two Kagyu schools with the closest association with Kailas were the Drigung ('Bri gung pa) and the Drukpa.⁸

As a mark of respect to the Zhabdrung, the King offered him a series of monasteries near the mountain. The monasteries which Sengge Namgyal granted to the Zhabdung were: Dar

⁶ Slob dpon Padma Tshe dbang [Lopon Pemala] *'Brug gi rgyal rabs slob dpon padma tshe dbang gis sbyar ba. 'Brug gsal ba'i sgron me. History of Bhutan.* (Thimphu, 1994), p 151. Lopon Pemala cites the *Lho'i chos byung*, fo. 37b as the source for this episode. I am grateful to the late Michael Aris for assistance in reading Lopon Pemala's text.

⁷ The legends surrounding the mountain are described in a guide composed by the 34th 'Bri gung gdan rabs, Bstan 'dzin chos kyi blo gros: *Gangs ri chen po ti se dang mcho ma dros pa bcas kyi sngon byung gi lo rgyus mdor bsdus su brjod pa'i rab byed shel dkar me long.* I am grateful to Tsering D. Gonkatsang for translating parts of this text on my behalf. Elena De Rossi Filibeck has published an edited transliteration of the text, with an annotated English summary: *Two Tibetan Guide Books to Ti se and La phyi* (Monumenta Tibetica Historica. Abteilung 1 Band 4. Bonn: VGH Wissenschaftsverlag, 1988).

⁸ See also Petech, Luciano (1979), "The 'Bri gung pa sect in Western Tibet and Ladakh", in *Proceedings of the Csoma de Kőrös Memorial Symposium 1976*, Louis Ligeti (Eds.), Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, pp. 313-325.

chen Bla brang dgon, Gnyen po'i ri rdzong, 'Bri ra phug, Rdzu 'phrul phug, Ge rdzong, Bya skyibs, Ye ri dgon phug, Gad ser, So mo rgyu, Shi ha ra.⁹ These are the territories which developed into Bhutanese enclaves in Tibet. In 1661 King Deldan Namgyal (Bde ldan rnam rgyal, r.1642-1694) confirmed all the existing rights of the southern school in his kingdom. His charter makes specific reference to the monasteries and associated properties on the 'snow mountain Ti se' (Kailas).¹⁰

Ladakh's close association with Bhutan was to have fateful consequences. In 1677 King Deleg Namgyal (Bde legs rnam rgyal) chose to take Bhutan's side in a war with Tibet.¹¹ This subsequently led the Lhasa government to invade Ladakh, and fighting continued from 1681-1683.¹² Ladakh was defeated and the Sixth 'Brug chen Mi pham dbang po helped mediate between the two sides to negotiate the treaty of Temisgang (Gting mo sgang) in 1684. Among other provisions in the treaty Ladakh agreed to send a triennial *lo phyag* mission to Lhasa carrying a specified list of symbolic gifts,¹³

⁹ Lopon Pemala, pp. 189-90. He does not give a source. Swami Pranavananda (*Kailas Manasarovar*, New Delhi: published by the author, 2nd ed. 1983, p.82) gives the following list of Bhutanese possessions in Tibet: 'Tarchen, at the foot of Kailas, Nyanri and Zuthul phuk Monasteris of Kailas, Cherkip Gompa of Manasarovar, the villages of Dungmar, Ringung, Doh, Khochar, Gezon near Gartok, Itse Gompa, Gonphu Gesur, Sammar and a few other places in Western Tibet'. See also the list cited by Sherring below.

¹⁰ The text is quoted, with a German translation in Schuh, *Frühe Beziehungen* (1983), pp. 51-54.

¹¹ Delek Namgyal seems to have taken over the reins of power while his father Deldan Namgyal was still alive.

¹² For the history of this war see Petech, Luciano (1947), "The Tibetan Ladakhi Moghul war 1681-1683", *Indian Historical Quarterly* 23, pp. 169-199; Zahiruddin Ahmad (1968), "New Light on the Tibet-Ladakh-Mughal War of 1679-1684", *East and West* 18, pp. 340-361; Luciano Petech (1977), *The Kingdom of Ladakh c. 950 1842*, Rome, I.S.M.E.O.

¹³ On the *lo phyag* mission, see Bray, John, "The Lapchak Mission from Ladakh to Lhasa and the Government of India's Foreign Policy

and it ceded the whole of Western Tibet to the Lhasa government with the exception of certain enclaves.

The Ladakhi Enclave at Minsar

The Ladakhi enclave was the estate of Minsar which the King retained, ostensibly to meet the religious offering expenses of Lake Manasarowar and Mount Kailas.

Minsar was a small settlement on the main trading route from Ladakh to Lhasa. The first Western reference to it comes from the early 19th century East India Company veterinary surgeon and explorer William Moorcroft who passed through in late July 1812.¹⁴ In Moorcroft's description, Minsar had "but one house made of bricks baked in the sun, and five tents of goat herds". However, he considered his stay there to have been profitable because he was able to buy a sample of Tibetan wool and he hoped that this would one day become a major trade item with the British. He recorded that the morning he spent there was hot and, with characteristic commercial astuteness, commented that this was "a circumstance in our favour as the sellers of wool are in the habit of wetting it under the idea as they pretend of its twisting the closer, but more probably to make it weigh heavier". Moorcroft considered that day to be "the epoch at which may be fixed the origin of a traffic which is likely to be

in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century", *The Tibet Journal* 15, No. 4, pp. 75-96; Bray, John and Gonkatsang, Tsering D., "Three 19th Century Documents from Tibet and the *lo phyag* Mission from Leh to Lhasa," in *Mountains, Monasteries and Mosques*, John Bray and Elena de Rossi Filibeck (Eds.). Supplement No. 2 to *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 80, Pisa and Rome, Sapienza, Università di Roma, pp. 97-116.

¹⁴ Moorcroft, William (1816). "A Journey to Lake Manasarovara in Undes, a Province of little Tibet". *Asiatick Researches* 12, pp. 375-534. On Moorcroft, see Alder, Garry J., *Beyond Bokhara: The Life of William Moorcroft, Asian Explorer and Pioneer Veterinary Surgeon 1767-1825*, London: Century Publishing.

extremely beneficial to the Honourable Company”. However, makes no reference to Minsar’s links with Ladakh.

In 1834 Zorawar Singh invaded Ladakh on behalf of Gulab Singh, the ruler of Jammu. After a series of battles, Ladakh finally lost its independence in 1842. Four years later, Gulab Singh became the first Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, including Ladakh. Jammu and Kashmir was a princely state within the Indian empire, and in theory the Government of India was responsible for its external relations. However, in 1852 the Kashmir government signed an agreement with Tibet agreeing to fulfil the obligations of the 1684 treaty, including the triennial *lo phyag* mission to Lhasa. It appeared that it acted on its own initiative, without reference to the British.¹⁵ Similarly, the Kashmir Durbar inherited Ladakh’s claim to Minsar and continued to collect revenue from it. In 1853, when Mehta Basti Ram was Wazir (governor) of Ladakh, this revenue amounted to Rs 56.¹⁶

I have not been able to find any detailed Western description of Minsar in the second half of the 19th century, but British officials in Kashmir and Ladakh were certainly aware of its existence. For example, in 1900 R.L. Kennion, who was British Joint Commissioner in Ladakh, wrote a despatch discussing corvée transport obligations in Ladakh and Tibet,¹⁷ and he mentions that by ancient custom the annual mission sent from Ladakh to Minsar was allowed free

¹⁵ An English version of the treaty is cited in Shakabpa, Tsepon W.D. (1982), *Tibet: A Political History*, New York: Potala Publications, p. 238.

¹⁶ *Report of the Officials of the Government of India and the People’s Republic of China on the Boundary Question* (Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, MEA 29. February 1961) p. 59.

¹⁷ On this topic see Bray, John (2008), “Corvée Transport Labour in 19th and Early 20th Century Ladakh: A Study in Continuity and Change,” in *Modern Ladakh: Anthropological Perspectives on Continuity and Change*, Beek, Martijn van and Pirie, Fernanda (Eds.), Leiden: Brill, pp. 43-66.

transport consisting of six baggage animals and one riding pony on both sides of the frontier.¹⁸ Kennion subsequently discussed whether Minsar should be included in the Ladakh land settlement (a detailed register of land ownership and taxation obligations), but the sole reference to Minsar in the preliminary report of the Ladakh settlement is as follows:

According to the papers prepared in Sambhat 1958, the number of villages in Ladakh Tahsil is 110 in addition to which is the village of Masur, which lies in the midst of Chinese Tibet and has never been visited by State Revenue officials.¹⁹

However, it appears that Kashmir was collecting revenue from Minsar throughout this period—for example, in 1905 the revenue amounted to Rs 297—and that Minsar was included in the final settlement report.²⁰ Minsar was also included in the 1911 and 1921 Indian censuses: in the 1921 census it was recorded as having 44 houses, 87 men and 73 women.

Meanwhile, the Tibetan authorities, while acknowledging Kashmir's rights in Minsar, also made their own claims. In 1929 E.B. Wakefield, an ICS officer, visited Western Tibet, and reported that Minsar paid taxes to Kashmir while at the same time fulfilling certain labour obligations to the Tibetan authorities:

¹⁸ British Library Oriental and India Office Collection (OIOC), L/PandS/7/125. Copy of a note dated the 30th May 1900 by Captain R.L.Kennion, Assistant to the Resident in Kashmir for Leh.

¹⁹ Mohamad, Chaudhri Khushi, *Preliminary Report of Ladakh Settlement* (Jammu, Ranbir Prakash Press, 1908), pp. 2-3. I am grateful to Martijn van Beek for locating this reference.

²⁰ *Report of the Officials*, p. 139. The source cited for the figure of Rs 297 is a tour report of Faqir Chand, Wazir-Wazarat (governor) of Ladakh in 1905. It seems that there is no copy of the final settlement report in any British library, and I have yet to locate one elsewhere.

I was surprised to learn that the inhabitants of Minsar and the neighbourhood own allegiance not to the Dalai Lama but to the Maharaja of Kashmir. Formerly, I was told, the 40 families resident in the Minsar district used to supply eight men to the Tibetan army, but now, being subjects of the Maharaja of Kashmir, they are exempt from this duty, though they are still compelled to provide free transport for Tibetan officials travelling through their territory. Every year the Lumberdar of Rupshu, or some petty official, from Ladakh comes to Minsar to collect the tribute due to the Maharaja of Kashmir. The tribute consists of 60 sheep, 20 goats, six yaks and 60 lambskins, whilst a sum of 60 rupees is paid half in rupees half in tankas, on account of the travelling expense of the Ladakhi official who collects the tribute.²¹

Ten years later Dr Kanshi Ram, the British Trade Agent, visited Minsar. The local people complained to him that they were forced to buy tea from Tibetan officials at a price above the market rate, a form of taxation known as 'Pujjar':

We left Chakra on the 21st and reached Minsar on the 23rd September and had to stay there for two days owing to the transport difficulties. The Minsar Gobas who are the subjects of the Kashmir government represented to me that although they had a letter from the Wazir Ladakh to the effect that they should not take any pujjar, yet Jingshung²² was still pressing them to take six loads (gams) of tea and two loads of

²¹ OIOC. L/P and S/4163. Narrative of the personal experiences of Mr E.B. Wakefield ICS in Western Tibet, 1929. Wakefield also refers to Minsar in his memoirs: *Past Imperative* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), pp. 60-61.

²² This appears to be a reference to the *gzhung tshong* a government official who was appointed by the Lhasa authorities and enjoyed wide trading privileges in western Tibet, including the right to requisition corvée labour for transport purposes.

grain as pujjar and requested me that I should represent their case to Jingshung. Upon this I saw Jingshung on the 25th September and represented the pujjar case of Minsar men to him. After a long discussion, he told me that it was a very old practice and he was sorry that he could not exempt them from it and assured me that he would now give only three gams of tea instead of six as I had approached him in this connection. I therefore did not approach him any more as the practice of giving pujjar is a very old custom.²³

The question of double taxation evidently continued to be a problem. In 1940 Tsetan Phuntsog, a senior Ladakhi official, visited Minsar on behalf of the Kashmir government. According to his wife's memoirs, he negotiated a satisfactory agreement with the Tibetan authorities, but she does not record the details.²⁴ However, Abdul Wahid Radhu, a Ladakhi Muslim merchant, passed through Minsar in 1942 as a member of the *lo phyag* mission to Lhasa, and he mentions that the inhabitants complained that they still had to pay taxes both to Kashmir and to Tibet.²⁵

Abdul Wahid Radhu was one of the last representatives of an ancient trading tradition. Soon after his visit, the political and economic situation in the Himalayan region changed irrevocably. In 1947 India and Pakistan became independent, but were quickly locked in dispute over Kashmir. Pakistani forces invaded Ladakh as well as the Kashmir valley, and in 1948 they came close to capturing Leh. The UN-brokered ceasefire in January 1949 froze the line of control between Indian and Pakistani troops, but failed to resolve the dispute.

²³ OIOC. L/PandS/12/4164. Diaries of the British Trade Agent at Gartok. No. 113A. Rai Bahadur Dr Kanshi Ram, BTA Gartok to Political Agent Punjab Hill States, Simla. 19 October 1939.

²⁴ Phuntsog, Sungkil (1988), "My Husband Kaga Thsetan Phunthsog", *Yarked*, Rajpur: Moravian Institute, p. 68.

²⁵ Radhu, Abdul Wahid (1981), *Caravane Tibétaine*, Paris: Fayard.

Political conditions on the northern side of the Himalaya changed even more drastically with China's invasion of Tibet in 1950 and the crackdown which followed the Lhasa uprising of 1959.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s the Indian and Kashmiri authorities were preoccupied with their internal problems and with the threat from Pakistan, and therefore neglected their Tibetan enclave. It appears that Minsar stopped paying taxes to Kashmir during this period: India did not formally abandon its claim, but it missed an opportunity to consolidate it in the early 1950s when relations between India and China were relatively favourable.²⁶

However, in the course of talks with China in the early 1960s, India maintained somewhat belatedly that Minsar was 'a Ladakhi enclave in Tibet and was held in full sovereignty by India'.²⁷ The context of these talks was the dispute over the boundary between India and Tibet which led to the Sino-Indian war of 1962-63. India referred to Ladakh's claim to Minsar, and its historical relationship with Tibet, to bolster its argument that its own claims represented the 'traditional' boundary.

The Sino-Indian boundary dispute remains unresolved. Since the 1960s the attention of the two governments has focused on the demarcation of the frontier and, more recently, on the prospects for mutual trade. The status of Minsar is no more than a minor footnote to these concerns, but one that has still to be cleared up.

²⁶ Personal communication from Phunchok Stobdan, Institute of Defence Studies and Strategic Analyses, New Delhi.

²⁷ *Report of the Officials*, *ibid.*

Bhutanese Enclaves

After the treaty of Temisgang the Tibetan government confirmed Bhutan's title to its lands in western Tibet.²⁸ The most important Bhutanese property was Darchen Labrang at the foot of Mount Kailas.

In some respects its history was similar to Minsar's: two governments claimed control over it, and its inhabitants were caught in the middle. However, Darchen had greater religious significance than Minsar because it was—and still is—the traditional starting point for pilgrims wishing to make the circuit of Mount Kailas. Moreover, Darchen was also the site of a trading mart in the summer months from mid-July to early September. Indian traders from Almora district purchased wool in exchange for cloth and other Indian goods.

The Bhutanese official in charge of Darchen was known as the *Gangs ri rdor 'dzin*. He was normally a senior lama who served in Darchen for a fixed term, and a Bhutanese legal code of 1729 mentions the post as one of the highest offices of state.²⁹ Many British accounts refer to the *rdor 'dzin* as the 'dashok' (*drag shos*), a title which referred to his ranking in the Bhutanese hierarchy. In addition to his religious duties, he was responsible for regulating prices in the Darchen trade mart and arbitrating in disputes. The numbers of pilgrims varied from year to year, but they were a source of revenue to the lama in charge of the monastery, and he remitted part of his earnings to Bhutan.

²⁸ F. Williamson, Political Officer Sikkim in the early 1930s, says that he made a copy of the Tibetan document confirming Bhutan's title. Letter from F. Williamson, Gartok, 6th January 1934. OIOC, L/PandS/12/4175. No. 1340. Williamson's letter is reprinted in Snelling, John (1990), *The Sacred Mountain*, 2nd ed., London: East West Publications, p. 423.

²⁹ *dPal 'brug pa rin po che mthu chen ngag gi dbang po bka' khrims thams cad las rnam par rgyal ba'i gtam*. See Aris, Michael (1986), *Sources for the History of Bhutan*, Vienna: Arbeitskreis für tibetische und buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, p. 147.

Bhutan claimed that Darchen and associated estates were completely independent of Lhasa. This claim led to frictions between the *rdor 'dzin* and the two Garpons (*sgar dpon*) of Gartok who were the Lhasa government's senior representatives in western Tibet. As will be seen, there are several references to such frictions in 20th century Western sources, and they no doubt occurred in earlier times as well.

The first Western traveller to visit Darchen was William Moorcroft, who went there in August 1812, Moorcroft's description reflects the fact that his prime interest was in trade:

There are four houses of unburnt brick or stones, and about twenty-eight tents, amongst which that of the servant of the Latáki agent is apparently the best. Sixteen years ago the old pundit says this was a place of consequence. There we may find many Juari and Dhermu merchants with grain and three tea merchants, who say they are acquainted with Pekin, which they call the capital of Maháchin: but they themselves reside two months journey beyond Pekin.³⁰

Nearly a century later, under the terms of the 1904 Lhasa convention, Britain secured the right to station a Trade Agent in Western Tibet. Unlike their counterparts in Gyantse and Yatung, all the British Trade Agents in Western Tibet were Indians. They spent every summer in western Tibet, but did not stay there in the winter. Their reports and official diaries are among the main British sources on western Tibet during this period, and occasionally refer to Darchen.

British officers from the Indian Civil Service (ICS) also made sporadic visits to Western Tibet. The first to do so was Charles Sherring, the District Commissioner of Almora, who

³⁰ Moorcroft, William (1816), "A Journey to Lake Manasarovara in Undes, a Province of Little Tibet", *Asiatick Researches* 12, pp. 375-534.

went there in 1905. Sherring reported that Darchen's political status of the region was already a source of controversy:

Here in the very midst of Tibetan territory we found an administration ruled by the Ruler of Bhutan, independent of the Gartok viceroys and of Lhasa itself. Apparently the whole is in the nature of a religious endowment, in which the Bhutan representatives will not now tolerate any interference, and so far have matters gone in the past that the retainers of the Darchan ruler have met those of the Garphans and blows have been exchanged, even firearms brought into use. During the last three years the appointed officer, who bears the title of Dashok, has been absent from Darchan without intermission, and his faithful servant has done the work in the ordinary course of events..... His work is an important one, as he is the head administrator of Darchan; of two monasteries, Nendiphu and Zutulphu (Jamdulphu of the maps) which are situated on the holy way round Kailas; of the Jaikep (Jenkhav) gumpa on Lake Manasarowar; of the very important place Khojarnath; of Rungung and Do on the upper Karnali river; of Gazon near Gartok; and four monasteries Iti, Gonphu, Gesur and Samur in the Daba Jongpen's territory.³¹

In 1905 minor disputes between Bhutanese and Tibetan officials were of no great concern to the British. However, King Ugyan Wangchuk of Bhutan evidently expected things to change after the Treaty of Punakha which he signed in 1910.³² Under the terms of this treaty Britain was to administer Bhutan's foreign relations which, in principle, might have been expected to include its dealings with Tibet.

³¹ Sherring, Charles A. (1906), *Western Tibet and the British Borderland*, London; rpt New Delhi: Cosmo publications 1974, p. 278.

³² See Aris (1994). Contemporary British records referred to Ugyan Wangchuk as the 'Maharaja'.

In December 1912 the King referred to the Bhutanese possessions around Mount Kailas in a letter to Charles—later Sir Charles—Bell, the Political Officer in Sikkim.³³ The Tibetan government was levying salt tax from the people living in the area, and the King contested its right to do so.

At the same time, with a touch of optimism, he mentioned an even older dispute. The fifth Dalai Lama had taken away most of the lands belonging to the Bhutanese owned monastery of Tö ling Tsurpo (Tib?), a day's journey from Lhasa. Could the British government put pressure on Lhasa to return this property? Bell duly consulted his superiors in the Government of India Foreign Department on both issues. Their conclusion was that it was 'unnecessary to consider the question of supporting the Maharaja unless and until serious contingencies of graver importance should arise'.

The tax issue remained unsettled, and in the 1920s the Lhasa government intensified its efforts to increase its revenue: among other expensive projects it wished to set up an army trained on British lines.³⁴ The Tibetan government's agricultural department, the *So nams las khungs*, began to register the residents of the Darchen area, who were mainly pastoral nomads, and to tax them accordingly. The King of Bhutan continued to object and engaged in 'acrimonious correspondence' with the Tibetan government.³⁵

In 1927 the murder of Nathi Johari, a trader from Almora district, created a further source of tension.³⁶ He was among

³³ C.A. Bell to Secretary of the Government of India Foreign Department, Gangtok, 1st May 1913. Oriental and India Office Collection (OIOC), L/PandS/ 12/2223.

³⁴ For the background to the Tibetan government's revenue policies see Goldstein, Melvyn (1989), *A History of Modern Tibet*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

³⁵ F. Williamson, *Ibid.*

³⁶ Lt Col. J.L.R. Weir, Political Officer Sikkim, to Foreign Secretary of the Government of India, Gyantse 30th July 1930. OIOC. L/PandS/12/4163 1165.

a group of traders who had stopped for the night at Larchen Dik, some 15 miles from Darchen, when they were attacked by bandits. Nathi Johari was wounded, and carried to Darchen, where he died. He had been a British subject, and the Government of India was therefore keen to secure the punishment of the murderers. The Garpons duly put pressure on the lama in charge of Darchen monastery (the incident took place during an interregnum between *rdor 'dzin*). However, the Bhutanese pointed out that the attack had taken place outside their territory, even though Nathi Johari had subsequently died within it. In any case they had little prospect of capturing an unidentified bandit. The Garpons were not satisfied with this reply: the case dragged on for several years, and was never satisfactorily settled.

In 1930 Bhutan's appointment of Tobdan La (Stobs ldan lags) to administer Darchen led to further tensions.³⁷ He was a layman rather than a monk, and the Lhasa authorities claimed that his appointment was contrary to established practice. Tobdan La's forceful approach to the tax issue further antagonised them: he took back as Darchen subjects a number of people who had previously been registered by the *So nams las khungs*. The Garpons responded by forcing these subjects to give up their Bhutanese 'nationality', and beat some of them severely. Eventually, Lhasa succeeded in securing Tobdan La's withdrawal. The Garpons appointed a Tibetan official, the former Ta tsam (Tib?) of Barkha to be in charge of Darchen.

In 1932 King Jigme Wangchuk of Bhutan appealed to Frederick Williamson, the Political Officer Sikkim to take up the Darchen dispute during a forthcoming visit to Tibet.³⁸ Williamson thought that the matter was 'really a religious one' and the British should intervene as little as possible. However, he responded to the King's request because he was 'extremely pressing' and because he thought the atmosphere

³⁷ Williamson (1934).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

in Lhasa was 'favourable to the receipt of friendly suggestions'. Williamson duly brought up the matter in Lhasa.

In his report Williamson pointed out that the tax issue 'raises the question whether Darchin is Bhutanese territory, as His Highness of Bhutan would claim, or whether it is merely an estate in Tibetan territory held by him, as the Tibetan government would claim'. However, he added that this point had been 'avoided by both sides'. It appears that they continued to avoid it thereafter, although the Tibetan government responded to Williamson's initiative by sending a conciliatory letter to the King of Bhutan.

Darchen came up again in the reports of the British Trade Agent in 1937.³⁹ He had two concerns. The first was that the Darchen Labrang had flogged the servant of a Johari trader for assaulting a Tibetan beggar. The Agent claimed that the Labrang had no right to punish a British subject without reference to him. The second issue was that the Labrang had been levying a tax of Rs 2 per head on Johari and Darma traders since the previous year again without the Agent's knowledge. The Labrang officials responded to both complaints by claiming that they had the authority to do as they wished because they were subject to Bhutan rather than Tibet: they therefore were not bound by any British agreement with the Tibetan authorities concerning judicial authority or taxes.

Bhutan continued to administer Darchen until 1959 when it was taken over by Chinese troops. Ten years earlier Bhutan had signed a treaty with the newly independent Indian government on similar lines to the Treaty of Punakha. On Bhutan's behalf, India raised the question of the Bhutanese

³⁹ British Trade Agent Gartok to Political Agent, Punjab Hill States, 9 September 1937. OIOC. L/PandS/12/4103.

enclaves with China in 1959 and 1960, but the latter refused to discuss the issue.⁴⁰

Since then there has been no public discussion of the Bhutanese enclaves. Bhutan does not maintain formal diplomatic relations with China, but in recent years it has held a series of meetings with Chinese diplomats to discuss the two countries' common boundary. It is understood that the two sides have reached broad agreement on the main issues, but there has been no formal settlement.

Conclusion: The Wider Context

The fact that Ladakhi and Bhutanese enclaves existed in Tibet was not in itself unusual. In the pre-modern period political linkages in the Himalaya consisted of a web of inter-relationships with many ambiguities. For example, many of the smaller kingdoms on Tibet's southern and eastern borders belonged within Lhasa's religious orbit, but at the same time found it convenient to acknowledge the temporal power of the rulers of India and China. The dividing line between political and religious obligation was frequently unclear.

As discussed in an earlier paper, Ladakh's triennial *lo phyag* mission to Lhasa—which is itself a product of the 1684 treaty of Temisgang—is one illustration of this ambiguity.⁴¹ The mission brought a specified set of offerings to Tibet; it was timed to arrive at the annual *smon lam* celebrations in Lhasa and therefore acquired religious connotations. The Tibetans apparently understood the mission to be an acknowledgement

⁴⁰ 'Note given to the Foreign Office of China, 19 August 1959' in *Notes, Memoranda and Letters exchanged and Agreements signed between the Governments of India and China, 1954-1959 (November 1959-March 1960), etc.* (New Delhi, Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations). See also Parmanand (1992), *The Politics of Bhutan*, New Delhi: Pragati publications, p. 163.

⁴¹ Bray, John, "The Lapchak Mission"; Bray, John, and Gonkatsang, Tsering D., "Three 19th Century Documents".

of Ladakh's tributary status in the political as well as the religious sphere. However, Ladakh simultaneously paid tribute to the Moghuls in the 17th and 18th centuries, and was later fully incorporated into a princely state within Britain's Indian empire. By the early 20th century the *lo phyag* had no direct political significance although it served a useful commercial purpose and was allowed to continue into the 1940s.

The Ladakhi and Bhutanese enclaves are a variation on a similar theme. In both cases the origin of the enclaves was 'religious', but at a time when there was no precise boundary between the 'religious' and 'political' spheres. Another example of overlapping political jurisdictions was Nepal's traditional entitlement to certain extra territorial rights in Tibet, notably the right to try Nepalese subjects in Tibet (and their mixed-race descendants) accused of criminal offences.⁴²

The traditional Tibetan state could accommodate such anomalies relatively easily. However, tensions became more acute in the first half of the 20th century when the Tibetan state was slowly becoming more centralised. As noted above, the increased requirement for taxes brought Lhasa into conflict with Bhutan over Darchen and indeed with certain Tibetan aristocrats over their own estates. In that respect the frictions of the 1920s and the 1930s were part of a process which was taking place all over Tibet. These frictions and contradictions were never fully resolved before the Chinese destroyed the traditional Tibetan political system in its entirety.

At first sight it seems unlikely the Ladakhi and Bhutanese enclaves could have survived into the 'modern' world, even without Chinese intervention. Perhaps the nearest surviving equivalents in the region are the 95 Indian enclaves (*chhit*) in

⁴². See Uprety, Prem R. (1980), *Nepal-Tibet Relations 1850-1930: Years of Hopes, Challenges and Frustrations*, Kathmandu: Puga Nara.

northern Bangladesh and the 130 Bangladeshi equivalents in north east India.⁴³ A total of some 100,000 Indian citizens are stranded in enclaves totally surrounded by Bangladeshi territory, and some of these are no larger than a few acres. The *chhits*' boundaries date back to pre-independence and indeed pre-British times: they are a consequence of the confusing and frequently overlapping boundaries between the lands of the Maharaja of Cooch Behar and the Zamindar of neighbouring Rangpur. In 1947 Cooch Behar acceded to India while Rangpur became part of East Pakistan and later Bangladesh.

The India/Bangladesh example demonstrates the problems associated with small landlocked enclaves, and serves as a reminder that unexpected historical anomalies may indeed survive into the early 21st century. It took more than 60 years after partition before India and Bangladesh were able to reach formal agreement on their common frontier.⁴⁴

On a similar note, China has yet to reach formal agreement on Tibet's boundaries with India and Bhutan. The latter have no hope of enforcing any residual claims to sovereignty over their Tibetan enclaves, but it is conceivable that they might yet seek compensation when negotiating a final boundary settlement. In this respect it may be that the history of the enclaves is still not entirely closed.

⁴³. For the history of the enclaves, see Whyte, Brendan R. (2002), *Waiting for the Esquimo: An Historical and Documentary study of the Cooch Behar Enclaves of India and Bangladesh*, Melbourne, School of Anthropology, Geography and Environmental Studies.

⁴⁴ As the reprint of this article was going to press in late August 2011, it appeared that the Indian and Bangladeshi governments were at last coming close to resolving the problem of the enclaves along their common border. See Menas Borders, "India and Bangladesh Finalising Land-swap Talks", 21st August 2011, www.menasborders.com.