



British Diplomatic Views on Nepal and the Final Stage of the Ch'ing Empire (1910–1911)¹

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At the edge of the town of Cassino, the central Italian city that was the scene, between January and May 1944, of one of the most important and difficult battles of the Second World War, two sixteen-year old soldiers lie. They are the youngest soldiers in that Commonwealth cemetery. Their names are Kalu Sing Limbu and Mane Rai. Both were ethnic Nepalese, riflemen of the Gurkha battalion from the district of Darjeeling.² Today Darjeeling is an Indian city in the state of West Bengal. Following the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814–1816 the Nepalese ceded the Hill of Darjeeling to the British East India Company and then, in 1817, the latter relinquished it to Sikkim, which returned the area to the British in 1835 in exchange for an annual payment.³ The two boys are a symbol of what the Nepalese people represented for the British Empire. The British had in fact begun to recruit (surrendered) Nepalese soldiers within their army already in 1815, following the Battle of Malaun.⁴ In subsequent years, the soldiers were known for their ability and also for the great loyalty to the British, even during the Sepoy Rebellion of the 1850s of the nineteenth century.⁵ The soldiers were from areas under British control as well as from Nepal.⁶ Therefore maintaining excellent relations between British India and Kathmandu meant ensuring the alliance of the largest and most powerful buffer-state of the Himalayas between India and Tibet, but also to secure a large reserve of soldiers on military fronts far away from southern Asia.

1 This paper is the revised version of a paragraph of my doctoral dissertation *L'Alta Asia buddhista (Tibet, Bhutan e Mongolia) tra il crepuscolo dell'Impero Ch'ing e la nascita della Repubblica cinese: aspetti geopolitici e diplomatici britannici* (University of Pisa, July 2014).

2 Embassy of India, Rome, Italy, Indian Soldiers died in Italy during World War II: 1943–45, <http://www.indianembassy.it/defence1.htm>, cit. [2013-11-01]; lists are in the website of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, <http://www.cwgc.org/>, cit. [2013-11-01].

3 E. C. DOZEY, *Concise History of Darjeeling District since 1835*, Calcutta 1922, pp. 2–3.

4 L. E. ROSE, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival*, Berkeley — Los Angeles 1971, p. 132.

5 Ibidem, pp. 132–133.

6 Ibidem, p. 132.

THE STATUS OF NEPAL: DIPLOMATIC AND HISTORICAL MATTER

Unified in the eighteenth century, with a majority of Hindu population and with deep historical and cultural relations with India, Nepal had been governed by a prime minister, a member of the Rana family who were allies of the British, with the title of maharaja (*mahārāja*) a few years after the defeat in the war with the British (1814–1816).⁷ The Treaty of Sugauli (in Nepali *Sugaulī sandhi*), signed on 2 December, 1815, had preserved the independence of the kingdom at the cost of large territorial concessions to the East India Company.⁸

While the Chinese, during the last period of the long agony of the Manchu dynasty, were invading Tibet, it was very important for the British Government and for the Government of India to clarify the nature of the relations of the Kingdom of Nepal with Peking. The English, of course, could not accept any claim of Peking over Kathmandu. The Chinese addressed the King of Nepal with the title of “*wang*” (王), ‘king’.⁹ The British problem was to realize if in that title there was “*anything implying that suzerainty is accepted by Nepal*”.¹⁰ And it seemed that Peking was using that title for the Nepalese monarch with the idea of addressing a vassal of the Celestial Empire.¹¹

The first treaty between Nepal and Tibet dates back to 1789: Tibet, defeated by Nepal, had pledged to pay an annual tribute to Kathmandu.¹² After that, the following year, the Ch’ing Emperor Ch’ien-lung¹³ (*regnabat 1735–1796*) sent to Rana Bahadur Shah, King of Nepal, in response to the first tribute sent from Kathmandu to Peking, a patent in which Rana Bahadur Shah was inserted among the tributaries of the Empire conferring him the title of “Wang Ertini”.¹⁴ At the same time he was asked

7 L. PETECH, “*Il Nepal*”, in G. TUCCI (Ed.), *Le civiltà dell’Oriente: storia, letteratura, religioni, filosofia, scienze e arte*, Vol. 1, Firenze — Roma 1965, p. 746.

8 Text of the treaty in C. U. AITCHISON (Ed.), *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements, and Sunnuds, Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, Vol. 2, Calcutta 1876, pp. 166–168.

9 The National Archives, London-Kew (further only TNA), Foreign Office (further only FO) 535/13, Government of India to the Earl of Crewe, November 16, 1910, FO 535/13, Enclosure in No. 187, p. 150.

10 Ibidem.

11 TNA, FO 535/13, Sir J. Jordan to Sir Edward Grey, November 24, 1910, No. 191, p. 152.

12 Actually, as explained by Leo E. Rose, there is no single text of the treaty, but a collection of letters. ROSE, p. 42.

13 In this paper I will use the Wade-Giles system for the phonetic transcription of Chinese.

14 On 7 March, 1911, Jordan sent to Lord Hardinge, Viceroy of India, the English translations, composed by Edmund Backhouse, of the Manchu patents granted to the king in 1790 and to the Nepalese Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana in 1870. The translation by Edmund Backhouse (see following footnote) is “*Prince of Law*”. The original definition is cited instead in TNA, FO 535/14, Sir J. Jordan to Lord Hardinge, March 7, 1911, Enclosure 1 in No. 32, p. 24, where Jordan proposes a meaning similar to the Chinese 法王 (*fa wang*), equivalent to Sanskrit “Dharma Raja” and hence “*Prince of (Religious) Law*” in English. TNA, FO 535/14, Patent of March 5, 1790, Encl. 2 in No. 32, p. 25; TNA, FO 535/14, Sir J. Jordan to Lord Hardinge, March 7, 1911, Enclosure 1 in No. 32, pp. 23–24; TNA, FO 535/14, Patent of March 5, 1790, Encl. 2 in No. 32, pp. 24–25; TNA, FO 535/14, Patent of July 5, 1870, Encl. 3 in No. 32, pp. 25–26; Letter of the Lhasa amban to the King of Nepal, Nepali text



“full reverence and respect for the law, and maintain its ordinances”, avoiding future conflicts with the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama.¹⁵ The Ch’ien-lung’s patents were so unconvincing that in 1791 Nepal invaded Tibet again and followed with a military victory of the Ch’ing over Kathmandu in 1792, a victory that forced the country to pay a quinquennial tribute, this time after a military defeat, to Peking.¹⁶ Therefore a new decree of the emperor followed that mission, underlining the presence of Nepal among the tributary states.¹⁷ *The Imperial Gazetteer of India* itself, in its 1908–1909 edition, tracing Nepalese history, reads: “By this time, however, the Gurkhas had concluded a peace, by which they were compelled to acknowledge the suzerainty of China”.¹⁸ Through another patent the Emperor T’ung-chih (regnabat 1861–1875) appointed the Nepalese Prime Minister (the real power holder in the kingdom in this period) “General of a Banner, and in special patent bestow upon you the honorific appellation of «Sincere»”.¹⁹ Rightly, however, the then British Ambassador to Peking, Sir John Jordan, recalled in his letter of 7 March, 1911, to the Viceroy of India, Lord Hardinge, that the first relations of the Chinese with the British at the end of the eighteenth century were also understood in the logic of the tributary system and that consequently “the language used in Chinese Imperial decrees must be read strictly in the light of ascertained facts before it can be accepted as proof of the existence of any state of affairs which it may purport to describe”.²⁰

So it was important at this point to have no doubts about the real nature of Sino-Nepalese relations in the early 1910s. The Nepalese had sent the latest missions with gifts to the Manchu Emperor, which had to be sent every five years (although that term time had not always been respected²¹), in 1894 (Nepalese year 1951)²² and in 1906.²³ However, at least in the historical period analysed in this paper, the Nepalese regarded that old relationship in a very different way and that ‘tribute’ was a simple exchange of gifts between two independent countries, such as the Prime Minister of Nepal, Chandra Shum Shere (1863–1929), was able to clarify in his letters to the British Resident in Nepal, John Manners Smith: “I have read with grave concern and astonishing the relation of China with Nepal contained in the note accompanying the letter

in V. K. MANANDHAR, *A Documentary History of Nepalese Quinquennial Missions to China: 1792–1906*, New Delhi 2001, Appendix E, p. 5.

15 TNA, FO 535/14, Patent of March 5, 1790, Enclosure 2 in No. 32, p. 25.

16 PETECH, p. 746. On the difference between the quinquennial Nepalese missions from 1792 onwards and the first mission of 1789, see the pages of “Background” in MANANDHAR, *A Documentary* without page numbers.

17 TNA, FO 535/14, Sir J. Jordan to Lord Hardinge, March 7, 1911, Encl. 1 in No. 32, p. 23.

18 *The Imperial Gazetteer of India (New Edition)*, Vol. XIX (1908), p. 34.

19 TNA, FO 535/14, Patent of July 5, 1870, Encl. 3 in No. 32, p. 26.

20 TNA, FO 535/14, Sir J. Jordan to Lord Hardinge, March 7, 1911, Encl. 1 in No. 32, p. 23.

21 Already the second mission was brought forward to 1795. V. K. MANANDHAR, *The Nepalese Quinquennial Missions 1792 and 1795 to China*, in: *Ancient Nepal (Prācīna Nepāla)*, No. 145, 2000 (Asāra 2057), p. 9.

22 TNA, FO 766/6, Letter from the Nepalese Prime Minister Chandra Shum Shere to John Manners Smith, 19 April, 1906, p. 6.

23 For a history of Nepalese missions to China from 1792 to 1906 see MANANDHAR, *A Documentary*.

and hasten to contradict the said statement and repudiate the claim of suzerainty that the Chinese Government have tried to fasten upon Nepal with all the emphasis and stress that I can command. This claim so lightly made by China is not only an unwarranted fiction but is also a damaging reflection on our national honour and independence. Our relation with China through of long standing has always been regarded by us as of a simple, friendly, and innocent nature. The missions that proceed from this country to China, of the nature of embassies from one court to another, have invariably been treated with honour and consideration due to foreign guests and their expenses entirely borne by the Chinese Government. The presents that they carry for the Emperor can never be regarded as tribute as they are mere 'Sangāts', bringing counter-presents from the court of China. They are merely the channels by which we try to keep up our friendly connections with distant China, express our high regard and respect for the Celestial Emperor, and cultivate the good-will and friendly feeling of the Chinese Government especially an account of our heavy stakes in Tibet. This matter being of the gravest importance I consulted the Durbar²⁴ who were stared to hear of this surprise so unexpectedly sprung upon Nepal by the Chinese Government and agreed with me about the necessity of promptly disavowing the claim, so derogatory to their status as a free people".²⁵

The Nepalese, however, did not just declare the total independence of the country from Peking, but claimed the full independence of Kathmandu also from the United Kingdom that, in addition to not recognizing the representative of Nepal at the rank of 'ambassador',²⁶ put Nepal among the Native States in the aforementioned edition of *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, causing a sharp discontent: "Horried as they were at this new turn of affairs they went on also to deplore the changed attitude of the Government of India in regard to the reception of an ambassador from Nepal since 1899 and to protest against the lowering of the prestige and status of this country

24 Persian word (*darbār*) for 'court'.

25 TNA, FO 766/6, Letter from the Nepalese Prime Minister Chandra Shum Shere to John Manners Smith, 19 November, 1910, pp. 10–11. In another letter of 1906 Chandra Shum Shere had already clarified the exclusive commercial nature of the quinquennial mission: "I may here add that the practice of sending a mission was inaugurated soon after the war between this country and China in 1792 A.D., and this practice has since been kept up for its commercial advantages than for anything else. The few presents which the mission carries to Peking are not of much value and certainly not in the nature of tribute. The customary letter which is sent on the occasion is written in the truly oriental style of exuberant but meaningless politeness and follows a stereotyped rule. They are merely a means for the party to gain access into the country under very advantageous circumstances and to dispose of with very great profit the large quantity of goods which they take with them. It may be known to you that all goods belonging to the party are carried free from our frontier to Peking and back by the transport provided by the Chinese Government which also provide our men free with all necessaries on the road. It has very little political significance. [...] In the letter to the Emperor it is distinctly written the word «Sangat» which means 'present'. Moreover our relations with and the trade and other facilities which we enjoy in Tibet make it incumbent upon us to keep this harmless and friendly practice as this country has a very considerable interest as well as various rights and privileges in the said country, commercial and otherwise". TNA, FO 766/6, Letter from the Nepalese Prime Minister Chandra Shum Shere to John Manners Smith, 19 April, 1906, pp. 7–8.

26 See S. TYAGI, *Indo-Nepalese Relations, 1858–1914*, Delhi 1974, p. 133.



consequent on its mention along with the Native States in the last edition of the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*".²⁷

Indeed, the inclusion of Nepal, a country that certainly had a greater level of independence than the Indian Native States, left open various perplexities. In the preface to the 1910 volume *The Native States of India*, written by Sir William Lee-Warner, we can read: "The number of Native states included in the Indian Empire is reckoned at 693 in the latest edition of the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, but this calculation places the territory of Nepal which is independent in matters of internal administration".²⁸

The Lee-Warner's words could be combined with those of George Campbell, dating back to 1852 (quoted in part by Lee-Warner himself²⁹): "It will be seen that Nepal alone retains any remains of independence, and, standing isolated, encompassed by our territories, that state has, as regards external politics, as little independent action as any other. But in its internal affairs we have never attempted to interfere. The Resident is rather an ambassador than a supervisor. Nepal, therefore, might be formidable if it had the means, but our security is in the smallness of its revenue. Its territory is almost entirely mountain, yields a comparatively small sum, and its army is very small. It is formidable on the defensive, but would be contemptible on the offensive".³⁰

The India Office and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Grey himself knew very well the full independence of Nepal, as demonstrated by the letter that Richmond Ritchie (of the India Office) wrote to the Foreign Office at end of March 1910: "The State of Nepal, as Sir E. Grey is aware, possesses a military strength and an independence which no other State in India can claim".³¹ Nepal could not be defined even as a protectorate. Ritchie, in the same letter just quoted, references the Tibeto-Nepalese War in the 1850s, from which victory Nepal obtained the right to receive the tribute from Lhasa.³² On that war we have to open a wide digression, given the important implications that it brought to Nepal and to defeat Tibet as well. Already in the conflict with Gulab Singh in 1842 the Chinese, who that same year signed the humiliating Treaty of Nanking, had not protected Tibet.³³ The 1856 Treaty with Nepal,³⁴ that concluded the hostilities started in 1854 and fought exclusively between Tibetans and Nepalese, without the intervention of either the British nor of the Chinese,³⁵ would be even a pillar of the Indian arguments about the validity of the Treaty of Simla of 1914, because, according to India, the recognition by the Government of the People's Republic of China of the Treaty of 1856 through the Sino-Nepalese Treaty of 1956

27 TNA, FO 766/6, Letter from the Nepalese Prime Minister Chandra Shum Shere to John Manners Smith, 19 November, 1910, pp. 11-12.

28 W. LEE-WARNER, *The Native States of India*, London 1910, p. vii.

29 Ibidem, p. ix.

30 G. CAMPBELL, *Modern India: A Sketch of the System of Civil Government: To which is Prefixed, Some Account of the Natives and Native Institutions*, London 1852, p. 160.

31 TNA, FO 535/13, India Office to Foreign Office, March 31, 1910, No. 54, p. 53.

32 Ibidem.

33 M. C. van WALT van PRAAG, *The Status of Tibet: History, Rights, and Prospects in International Law*, Boulder 1987, pp. 22-23.

34 Full text of the treaty in English (translated from Tibetan) in C. BELL, *Tibet Past and Present*, Oxford 1924, pp. 278-280.

35 Van WALT van PRAAG, p. 23.



(Article 3 of which reads: “All treaties and documents which existed in the past between China and Nepal including those between the Tibet Region of China and Nepal are hereby abrogated”³⁶) would be at the same time the recognition of the authority of Tibet in negotiating international treaties, and therefore also the Treaty of Simla, signed by the Tibetans and the British, but without the Chinese.³⁷ Basically it is in the years between the first and second half of nineteenth century that China, about sixty years before the Younghusband expedition (1903–1904), had already substantially failed in its role on Tibet.³⁸

At the same time, however, the treaty also demonstrates the Nepalese authority. Indeed in the Treaty of 1815 the Rajah of Nepal simply engages himself to renounce to “all claim to or connexion with the countries lying to the west of the River Kali”³⁹ (article 5th), to not create problems to Sikkim and to refer and recognize the British arbitration “if any differences shall arise between the State of Nipal and the Rajah of Sikkim, or the subjects of either” (article 6th) and “never to take or retain in his service any British subject, nor the subject of any European or American State, without the consent of the British Government” (article 7th). Kathmandu did not give up its foreign and defence policies. And in fact Richmond Ritchie wrote again to the Foreign Office that the two differences between Nepal and neighbouring Bhutan, both independent countries, are in the military vulnerability of Bhutan and then that, according to the Treaty of Punakha, “the foreign affairs of Bhutan are under the control of the British Government”.⁴⁰

In this context we understand even better the words of the Nepalese Prime Minister who then concluded his letter to Manners Smith: “I shall feel greatly relieved if the Government of India would be pleased to enable me to remove their anxieties, allay their fears, and inspire confidence in their minds by definite assurances that the ancient status and independence of Nepal would be maintained intact and would not be interfered with in any way, and also to instil hopes that the great British Government, in addition to their various and valuable proofs of friendship and favours, mindful of the services of the Nepal Government in the past as well as in the future, will continue to stretch the hand of friendship and help to this small Gurkha State so that the Gurkhas in the hour of need of the British Government may compensate in however small a way with their life-blood the various good

36 Full text of the treaty in English (the treaty was written in English, Chinese and Nepali) in the web-site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjby/zjg/yzs/gjlb/2752/2753/>, cit. [2013-09-01].

37 *Report of the Officials of the Government of India: And the People’s Republic of China on the Boundary Question*, Vol. 1, New Delhi 1961, p. 246.

38 Van WALT van PRAAG, pp. 22–23.

39 It is the Mahākālī nadī, still on the Indo-Nepal border.

40 “But with Bhutan the case is somewhat similar to that of Nepal, with, however, two exceptions. The first of these is that Bhutan is very weak, and its boundaries are even more indefinite than those of Nepal, and the second point is that by a recent treaty the foreign affairs of Bhutan are under the control of the British Government”. TNA, FO 535/13, India Office to Foreign Office, March 31, 1910, No. 54, p. 53. Actually, it should be noted that, according to the Treaty of Punakha, the Bhutanese had not renounced to their foreign policy, but they had simply accepted a British guide: “the Bhutanese Government agrees to be guided by the advice of the British Government in regard to its external relations”. For the full text of the Treaty of Punakha see A. J. PEASLEE, *Constitutions of Nations*, Vol. 1, Concord 1950, pp. 147–148.



and friendly offices of the said Government".⁴¹ Exactly because of the very strong sense of independence, in the first weeks of 1910, the British feared a conflict between Nepal and Tibet that had been invaded by the Chinese.⁴²

In response, Manners-Smith explained to the Nepalese Prime Minister that, although they cannot lawfully grant the title of ambassador to the representative of the King of Nepal that did not mean a change in the accorded treatment.⁴³ Manners-Smith justified the last edition of the *Imperial Gazetteer* as an attempt to explain the relations between India and Nepal, ensuring the Nepalese Durbar that there was no offensive intention or aimed to diminish the "*status and privileges*" of the Durbar.⁴⁴ The issue of the independence of Nepal would be repeatedly affirmed by the Prime Minister of Nepal to Manners-Smith, both by letter and in person. In a meeting that had followed the letter of 1910, the Maharaja showed to Manners-Smith the original letter, which dates back to 31 March, 1885, written by Lord Dufferin to the Nepalese Prime Minister of the time, Ranodip Singh (1825–1885), in which the then viceroy of India defined the Himalayan country as an independent state.⁴⁵

Another related matter was the issue about military supplies. In 1893 Lord Lansdowne informed the Nepalese Durbar of the British approval to sell and import weapons to Nepal, in "reasonable" quantities, but during the following years "*there have been differences of opinion between the Durbar and the Government of India as to what may be considered the reasonable requirements of the Nepal State. The Government of India have consistently refused to allow the Durbar to import machinery for the manufacture of warlike stores*".⁴⁶ Manners-Smith, "*for conciliating the Durbar*", proposed to the Government of India "*that the Durbar should now be informed that they are at liberty to import such machinery and stores*" and to provide to the Nepalese army "*magazine rifles, in order that they might be available for Imperial defence when required*".⁴⁷ These were options that the Government of India would prefer to avoid.⁴⁸ Calcutta⁴⁹ did not agree, because it was deemed inapplicable, also with another proposal of the British Resident in Kathmandu that was to leave to the Nepalese Prime Minister the full freedom of

41 TNA, FO 766/6, Letter from the Nepalese Prime Minister Chandra Shum Shere to John Manners Smith, 19 November, 1910, p. 12.

42 "*At the same time Nepal stands apart from the Indian protectorate, and is very jealous of any interference. It has in times past settled its own quarrels with Thibet, and is entitled to have its own Resident at Lhassa. Its army is efficient, and would probably give effect to any policy in Thibet which the Prime Minister might decide upon. In view of the considerations it is of the utmost importance to avoid a collision between Nepal and its neighbour*", TNA, FO 535/13, India Office to Foreign Office, February 9, 1910, No. 4, pp. 5–6.

43 The reply by Manners-Smith is explained in a letter of the Government of India to the Secretary of State for India Robert Crewe-Milnes, TNA, FO 535/14, Government of India to the Earl of Crewe, February 2, 1911, Encl. in No. 16, p. 12.

44 Ibidem.

45 Ibidem.

46 Ibidem.

47 Ibidem.

48 Ibidem, pp. 12–13.

49 At the beginning of 1911 the capital of the Raj was still Calcutta. On 12 December, 1911, on the occasion of his coronation in Delhi, King George V announced the transfer of the

communication with Lhasa and Peking but to consult and to report to the Government of India.⁵⁰ In this case, according to the Government of India, it was not possible to grant anything to the Prime Minister that he has enjoyed, and would continue to enjoy, namely full freedom in Tibeto-Nepalese and Sino-Nepalese relations.⁵¹

The Government of India recognized the error in the last edition of the *Imperial Gazetteer* and was willing to declare it officially⁵² and to ensure to the Nepalese Prime Minister the recognition of the full independence of Kathmandu, and that London would continue to protect Nepal in case of “unprovoked attack” and “that so long as the Prime Minister consults the British Government and follow their advice when given, and preserves his present and friendly attitude, His Majesty’s Government will not allow the interests and rights of Nepal to be affected or prejudiced by any administrative changes in Thibet”.⁵³ A position on which the Government of India, the India Office, the Foreign Office and the rest of the UK Government agreed.⁵⁴ On June 1911, instead of the machinery, the Government of India proposed to the India Office (which agreed) to donate, on the occasion of the visit of the King of Nepal, 2,000 Lee-Metford rifles together with 500,000 cartridges.⁵⁵ Thus, on 1 May, 1911, it was Manners-Smith’s duty to reassure the Nepalese Prime Minister, announcing the positions of the Raj and also that “the Government of India are glad to meet your Excellency’s wishes in the matter, and I am to say, therefore, that the Government of India have no desire whatever to interfere with the independent position which the State of Nepal has hitherto enjoyed”.⁵⁶ The British would continue to support Nepal, while the Himalayan kingdom would continue to send Gurkha soldiers “in the hour of need”.⁵⁷

capital to Delhi. Announcements of H. I. M. King-Emperor George V. at the Coronation Durbar, December 12, 1911, in P. MUKHERJI (Ed.), *Indian Constitutional Documents (1773–1915)*, Calcutta 1915, p. 374.

50 TNA, FO 535/14, Government of India to the Earl of Crewe, February 2, 1911, Enclosure in No. 16, p. 13.

51 Ibidem.

52 “While, however, we are not prepared to advocate any material change in our policy towards the Nepal Durbar, we think it desirable to remove by a formal pronouncement the misapprehension that has arisen owing to the changes made in the gazetteer, changes which, in the light of subsequent events, we cannot but regard as unfortunate”. Ibidem.

53 Ibidem.

54 TNA, FO 535/14, India Office to Foreign Office, March 11, 1911, No. 16, p. 11; TNA, FO 535/14, Foreign Office to India Office, March 15, 1911, No. 18, p. 14; TNA, FO 535/14, Viscount Morley to Government of India, March 28, 1911, Encl. in No. 24, p. 19. The decision of the Government of India was communicated to Manners-Smith on 24 April, 1911; TNA, FO 535/14, Government of India to Lieutenant-Colonel Manners-Smith, April 24, 1911, Encl. 2 in No. 63, p. 56.

55 TNA, FO 535/14, Government of India to the Marquess of Crewe, June 23, 1911, Encl. 1 in No. 54, p. 49; TNA, FO 535/14, The Marquess of Crewe to the Government of India, July 24, 1911, Encl. 2 in No. 54, p. 49.

56 TNA, FO 535/14, Lieutenant-Colonel Manners-Smith to the Prime Minister and Marshal of Nepal, May 1, 1911, Encl. 4 in No. 63, p. 59.

57 Ibidem.



Reassured by those words, despite never having “*seriously doubted that there could be anything but a relation of friendship and mutual confidence between the Government of India and Nepal*”, the Prime Minister thanked Manners-Smith after just two days.⁵⁸

THE TRIBUTE THAT HAS NEVER BEEN PAID

A few months later, however, in September, an old problem appeared again, from the point of view of the British, in the regard to the relations between Kathmandu and Peking: the quinquennial mission.⁵⁹ Nepalese Durbar, in fact, received from Lhasa amban a letter which stated that, having been passed the period of mourning for the death of the Emperor Kuang-hsü (who had died in 1908), it was now necessary to send presents and a letter to the new Ch'ing Emperor P'u-i.⁶⁰

Of concern to the English was the response of Kathmandu, that communicated to the amban that Nepal would send the “*presents and a letter of condolence [...] with the next quinquennial mission to Peking when the Nepal Durbar receive notice that it can start*”.⁶¹ According to Manners-Smith that letter proved that Nepal was not changing its line with China.⁶² A few days later, however, the Republican Revolution broke out in China, a situation that the British could use to their advantage in the relationship with Nepal: according to the Foreign Office, they had to put pressure, through the Government of India, on the Government of Nepal to renounce the sending of the mission.⁶³ Since the situation in Peking was not clear yet (the Republic of China was to be declared on 1 January, 1912, and P'u-i abdicated in February), the Government of India proposed to the Marquess of Crewe to ask Nepal, for the moment, just a temporary postponement of the mission so as to easily get a positive response from the Nepalese Durbar.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, in case of a mission, Nepal would still consult the British.⁶⁵ Both the India Office and Foreign Office agreed on this option although initially Sir Edward Grey had wanted a definitive conclusion of the missions.⁶⁶ Manners-Smith informed the Nepa-

58 Ibidem.

59 TNA, FO 535/14, Lieutenant-Colonel J. Manners Smith to Government of India, September 25, 1911, in No. 89, p. 86.

60 Ibidem.

61 Ibidem.

62 Ibidem.

63 On 7 November, 1911, the Foreign Office wrote to the India Office “*It appears to Sir E. Grey that the changed situation and the general position of affairs in China would seem to afford good grounds for deprecating the dispatch of this mission, and he would therefore suggest, for the consideration of the Marquess of Crewe that the Government of India should be consulted as to whether any influence could be brought to bear upon the Nepalese Government to induce them to reconsider their decision*”, TNA, FO 535/14, Foreign Office to India Office, November 7, 1911, No. 92, p. 87.

64 TNA, FO 535/14, Government of India to the Marquess of Crewe, November 25, 1911, Encl.2 in No. 100, p. 96.

65 Ibidem.

66 TNA, FO 535/14, India Office to Foreign Office, November 29, 1911, No. 100, pp. 95–96; TNA, FO 535/14, Foreign Office to India Office, December 4, 1911, No. 103, p. 97; TNA, FO



lese Prime Minister about the British position in a meeting (9 December, 1911)⁶⁷ and by a written communication (10 December, 1911).⁶⁸ In the text he wrote that “*the question is one of interest to His Majesty’s Government, owing to the peculiar political significance which is known to be attached to the mission by the Chinese Foreign Office*”.⁶⁹ Chandra Shum Shere reassured the British Resident first verbally.⁷⁰

A few days later, on 17 December, 1911, the Nepalese Prime Minister wrote a letter to Manners-Smith trying to dispel all the British doubts on the nature of the missions of Nepal to Peking.⁷¹ Chandra Shum Shere was astonished that the Chinese assigned a particular meaning to the mission of Nepal.⁷² Indeed the British formally had never warned the Nepalese Prime Minister of the Manchu claims over the country, as well as that the Maharaja was not even made aware of the negotiations between the British Government and the Wai-wu pu (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs) on the status of Nepal.⁷³ At the same time, however, Manners-Smith described the Maharaja’s surprise “*slightly disingenuous*” knowing that the Nepalese had to be aware of the fact that, from the Chinese point of view, those missions symbolized a relationship of vassalage “*and that the presents which accompany the mission are a tribute*”.⁷⁴ The Maharaja wrote to the British Resident: “*I am in the dark whether the British Government are in possession of the views of China on the subject and if so what was the nature of the communication made by them with regard to the status of Nepal and what was the reply that China gave to it*”.⁷⁵ Therefore Manners-Smith suggested to the Government of India that it inform the Nepalese Prime Minister of those negotiations.⁷⁶ Authorized by the Government of India,⁷⁷ the British Resident drew up for the Maharaja of Nepal, a brief summary of the negotiations between the British and the Wai-wu pu.⁷⁸

535/14, The Marquess of Crewe to Government of India, December 5, 1911, Encl. in No. 105, p. 98.

67 TNA, FO 535/15, Resident in Nepal to Government of India, December 10, 1911, Encl. 2 in No. 4, p. 5.

68 TNA, FO 535/15, Resident in Nepal to Prime Minister of Nepal, December 10, 1911, Encl. 3 in No. 4, p. 5.

69 Ibidem.

70 TNA, FO 535/15, Resident in Nepal to Government of India, December 10, 1911, Encl. 2 in No. 4, p. 5.

71 TNA, FO 766/6, Letter from the Nepalese Prime Minister Chandra Shum Shere to John Manners Smith, 17 December, 1911, pp. 13–14.

72 Ibidem.

73 TNA, FO 535/15, Lieutenant-Colonel Manners-Smith (Resident in Nepal) to Government of India, March 7, 1912, Encl. 1 in No. 54, p. 40.

74 Ibidem.

75 TNA, FO 766/6, Letter from the Nepalese Prime Minister Chandra Shum Shere to John Manners Smith, 17 December, 1911, p. 13.

76 TNA, FO 535/15, Lieutenant-Colonel Manners-Smith (Resident in Nepal) to Government of India, March 7, 1912, Enclosure 1 in No. 54, p. 40.

77 TNA, FO 535/15, Government of India to Lieutenant-Colonel Manners-Smith, March 27, 1912, Encl. 4 in No. 54, p. 41.

78 TNA, FO 535/15, Lieutenant-Colonel Manners-Smith to Prime Minister of Nepal, March 31, 1912, Encl. 2 in No. 60, pp. 46–47.



On 4 April, 1912, Chandra Shum Shere had to reassure Manners-Smith again and reject clearly the position of Prince Ch'ing in the negotiations with the British of which, only at this time, the Maharaja had become acquainted: "Our views on the question of the claim which His Excellency Prince Ching appears to have given expression to in connection with our relations with China are already well-known to you and to your Government. It is impossible for us not to repudiate the claim with all the emphasis at our command, based as it is on mistaken grounds and a misconstrued views of the relations that bind us to the Government of China. I need hardly repeat that we regard the relation as essentially friendly and complimentary and it is much to be regretted if a false interpretation is put upon it to neutralise its real significance".⁷⁹

Meanwhile, on 12 May, Sir John Jordan wrote to Sir Edward Grey from Peking about the possibility of an intervention of Nepal in Lhasa to restore order.⁸⁰ Similarly, in London, even the India Office asked the Government of India if it was not desirable, at this point, for a Nepalese intervention in Tibetan territory so as to avert a Chinese "reconquest".⁸¹ The Nepalese, in fact, aimed, like the British, at the restoration of Tibetan independence ("practical independence").⁸² To Kathmandu it was definitely better to have over their northern border, "in the future as in the past", a free Tibet, instead of a menacing Chinese province.⁸³

In any case, the republican revolution in China would solve the previous problems with the British (while opening new ones): in the whirling collapse of the Imperial institutions a new geopolitical order would emerge in the Far East, an order that would be built on the dismantling of the historical links to the emperor, both within the Empire (as for Tibet and Mongolia) or external (as for Nepal).

79 TNA, FO 766/6, Letter from the Nepalese Prime Minister Chandra Shum Shere to John Manners Smith, 4 April, 1912, p. 15.

80 TNA, FO 535/15, Sir J. Jordan to Sir Edward Grey, May 12, 1912, No. 63, p. 53.

81 "I should be glad to have your views as to whether Nepal should be encouraged to intervene. The present seems an opportune moment, and action on part of Nepal might pave the way to local settlement of Thibetan question on satisfactory lines, risk of Chinese reconquest being thus avoided", TNA, FO 535/15, The Marquess of Crewe to Government of India, May 16, 1912, Encl. in No. 73, p. 64.

82 "I am now in a position to assure the Government of India that the earnest desire of the Nepal Durbar is to see Thibet restored to its proper status of practical independence, and that to attain this object Nepal is prepared to aid Thibet by all the means in her power which may be approved by the Government of India", TNA, FO 535/15, Lieutenant-Colonel J. Manners-Smith to Government of India, April 22, 1912, Encl. in No. 92, p. 88.

83 "The Nepal Durbar consider that their interests will be better served by maintaining in the future as in the past an independent Thibetan Government for a neighbour rather than a Thibet converted into a province of China". Ibidem.

**BRITISH DIPLOMATIC VIEWS ON NEPAL AND THE FINAL STAGE
OF THE CH'ING EMPIRE (1910-1911)****ABSTRACT**

This paper shows and analyses the issue of the relations between Nepal and the Ch'ing Empire from the British point of view during the last months of the Manchu authority in China. Nepal, a buffer state between India and Tibet, represented for the British an important and decisive ally in South Asia. The first part of the work will be dedicated to an analysis of the political and geopolitical status of Nepal compared to Britain and China of the Ch'ing Dynasty. The second part, which further develops the first, enters into the specifics of a tribute that the Himalayan country should have offered the Emperor P'u-i. The Hsin-hai Revolution of 1911 put an end to imperial power in China and would lead to the establishment of the republic and would resolve issues and misunderstandings between the countries. The paper pays particular attention to the correspondence between the then Nepalese Prime Minister, Chandra Shum Shere, and the British Resident in Nepal, John Manners Smith. The research takes as a benchmark the wider scenario of the period immediately following the end of the Great Game and the decline of the Manchu power. The guideline and key to interpretation of the documents reflects the perspective of the geopolitical and strategic interests of the British Empire in Asia.

KEYWORDS

Nepal; Tibet; China; Ch'ing; British Raj; India; United Kingdom; Bhutan; Sikkim; Chandra Shum Shere

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