INTRODUCTION

Since 2004 the current author, along with a number of colleagues, has been involved in the examination of the Sikkimese Palace archives, which includes documents from Sikkim, Tibet, Bhutan and British India. The archives covers a variety of topics, historical periods and genres of literature (see Mullard and Wongchuk 2010 for further details). One such topic is the Sikkim-Gam pa disputes of the 1860s involving different communities along the Tibet-Sikkim border. The archives contain fifteen documents on these disputes, though it is the agreement (PD/4.1/004), which is the main subject of this paper, and provides the most detailed information regarding this series of disputes. This paper will show that the disputes centred on access to pasture lands and other territories and taxation payments given by Tibetan authorities to Sikkim as a form of compensation for the loss of Sikkimese taxable estates in North Bengal following the British annexation of what is now modern Darjeeling district in 1850. In addition this paper will argue that as a result of granting Sikkimese tax concessions in Gam pa the taxation responsibilities of the general population of Gam pa was increased leading to tense relationships between the border populations of northern Sikkim and southern Tibet. With an examination of the Gam pa-Sikkim agreement it will be shown that these tensions erupted into violence, murder and theft. This paper will then conclude by arguing that whilst disputes and conflict resolution may have been common in the Tibetan world generally, the case of the Gam pa disputes were politicised by the role of the British in Himalayan affairs and the fear of British expansion; a fear which dominated Manchu policy in Tibet following the second Opium War of 1856-1860.

AN OVERVIEW OF TIBETAN AND SIKKIMESSE RELATIONS

From the vast number of letters and correspondence between Sikkim, Tibetans and the Manchu authorities found in the Sikkimese palace archive it is possible to piece together a general picture of the theories that shaped Tibetan and Sikkimese relations. This period in Tibetan history is characterised by de-centralisation of both power and
authority, but also by a matrix of theoretical, if not always practical, political hierarchies, which for the purpose of this paper can be described as the politics of subsumation. This is a reference to the Manchu presence in Tibet, and the Manchu understanding of Tibet as a tributary of the Qing Empire. Similarly, Sikkim was also viewed within this matrix of subsumed political relations, as a tributary of Tibet. So as far as the Manchu Amban in Lhasa was concerned, there was a framework of hierarchical authority, subsumed under which was Tibet (and its sub-units) and Sikkim in turn was subsumed under Tibet. Similarly within both Sikkim and Tibet ‘lower levels’ of authority existed such as Tashilhunpo, Sa skya in Tibet or Lachen (Tib. La chen), Lachung (Tib. La chung) or the aristocratic estates in Sikkim, which were subsumed under the umbrella of either the Tibetan ‘state’ or the Sikkimese ‘state’. However, with the exception of tax collection those subsumed units were not completely integrated into the Tibetan or Sikkimese state on a day to day level. Yet there existed a theoretical legal framework, according to Goldstein, whereby cases could be appealed to Lhasa, though it is clear that most legal disputes were resolved locally.

The history of Sikkim usually (and also for contemporary political reasons) precludes any discussion of Sikkim as a ‘constituent part’ of Tibet; and, given its high degree of autonomy and its independent history of state formation, the relationship between Sikkim and Tibet is also a complicated one. However, it is fair to say that, to a certain degree, Sikkimese authority was understood, mainly by the Qing Dynasty and the Amban in Lhasa, as being subsumed within the wider matrix of the authority

1 Personal communications with John Ardussi 1-3 September 2010.
2 The Sikkimese situation is slightly different to the Tibetan one. Sikkim, like Tibet, was politically fragmented into five monastic states, numerous aristocratic estates, areas with a form of self-government (Lachen and Lachung), and regions of disputed ‘sovereignty’ such as Ilam and Morang in Nepal or the plains of Northwest Bengal. Throughout Sikkim’s history there has been a struggle for power between the landed-aristocracy on the one hand and the Chos rgyal on the other. However, all aristocrats understood their position as subservient to that of the king, though the political reality often oscillated between periods of defragmentation and direct royal authority and rule. Close inspection of the Palace Archives show that successive Chos rgyal’s attempted to curb the power of the aristocracy through legislation and the direct appointment of officials within aristocratic estates. The extent to which these policies were successful depended on the strength, personality and concerns of the king as like Tibet it was often the case that the Chos rgyal was satisfied with a regular supply of income from the aristocratic estates and not in the direct administration of the state.
3 Goldstein 1971: 175, also notes that this right to appeal to Lhasa also existed for mi ser, under the different estates (be they aristocratic, religious or otherwise) in central Tibet.
4 It could be argued that the Sikkimese state was formed as a result of the migration of Tibetan religious refugees to Sikkim following the formation of the Tibetan state in 1642. Whilst, it is clear that those migrations took place and that those religious refugees validated (through religio-political theory) and legitimised the Sikkimese state, they did not form the Sikkimese state. The Sikkimese state was rather formed out of a series of secular alliances between different proto-states in western Sikkim. For details on the formation of the Sikkimese state see Mullard 2011.
of Lhasa and by extension the Qing Empire. This is attested to not only in the copious writings of the Ambans and Lhasa administration to the Sikkimese, involving the British in the Himalaya (see Mullard and Wongchuk 2010 for details of those letters), but also in the use of hierarchic kinship terms to define the relationship between Lhasa and the Sikkimese Chos rgyal’s government. In legalistic and administrative documents from this period the relationship between Lhasa and the Sikkimese government is described as being that of the uncle and nephew (zhang–isha bo or dbon-zhang) or father and son, with Lhasa as the father/uncle and the Sikkimese government as the nephew/son. Indeed a brief study of Sikkimese history indicates that there was a degree of reality to this hierarchic relation, as one of the major themes in Sikkimese history is the reliance on Tibetan assistance during times of war or instability, yet it is also true that the extent to which Lhasa intervened in Sikkimese affairs depended on the relative strength of the administration in Lhasa. It is here that Geoffrey Samuel’s application of Tambiah’s galactic polity (1993: 61-63) proves to be an important tool for understanding the relations at the inter-state level between the Sikkimese government and Lhasa as well as the relationships between Lhasa and other polities in Central Tibet. It is perhaps then more accurate to understand Sikkim, at certain times, as a state in orbit around Lhasa and, at certain times in its history, under the ‘gravitational’ influence of Lhasa, rather than a constituent part of Tibet, much the same way as one can understand Lhasa’s relationships with other sub-units in central Tibet.

During the period of the Gam pa-Sikkim disputes one of the key issues for Tibet was the pressure applied upon them by the Qing to prevent British involvement in Tibet. This primarily resulted from British activities in mainland China, in particular the trade disputes between British Merchants and Chinese authorities. With the growth of a market for Chinese products (mainly tea and silks) in Europe, European traders had embarked upon trade with China. However, China refused to trade their products for European products choosing only to accept silver or gold bullion. This had a detrimental impact on the British economy as Britain did not have large enough reserves of silver to balance trade payments, which in turn forced the British to buy silver in order to purchase Chinese goods. It was only with the development of the clandestine trade of Indian opium that the British were able to turn the tables on

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5 Often this “father-son” relationship is triangulated to include Bhutan which is identified as the “mother” establishing a three tiered hierarchic relationship with Tibet (the father) followed by Bhutan (the mother) and Sikkim (the son). The idea behind this is that all three countries should act to the other 2 countries in the way expressed through the kinship metaphor i.e. with love and respect and in the cases of those lower in the hierarchy with deference. This term was often used to defuse political conflict between the three states.

6 The use of this terminology has been eloquently discussed in Dotson (2009). In that paper Dotson discusses the kinship relations that become developed through the offering and receiving of marriage partners. Sikkim and Tibet shared this relationship with Tibetan aristocrats providing wives for the kings of Sikkim.
Chinese traders, demanding that payments for opium be made in silver, which was then used to purchase other Chinese products. Qing attempts to disrupt the opium trade led to the two opium wars of 1839-42 and 1856-60, resulting in a series of massive defeats for the Chinese, the annexation of Hong Kong Island in the First Opium War\(^7\) and Kowloon peninsula in the Second Opium War\(^8\) an opening of ten further ports for European traders and rights for European diplomats to travel to Beijing. These events were largely responsible for the Qing policy of excluding Europeans from Tibet, a policy which had a knock on effect for Sikkim.

### THE GAM PA-SIKKIM AGREEMENT

The Gam pa-Sikkim agreement was found in the Sikkimese Palace Archive (Document number: PD/4.1/004) by the current author and his colleague Hissey Wongchuk in 2009. The agreement was signed in 1867 and is 237 lines long and is divided into seventeen clauses (\textit{don tshan}), with a preamble at the start and a concluding statement at the end, followed by the signatories. Unfortunately, the original agreement complete with seals was probably kept in Tashilhunpo or possibly Phag ri and the document from which this summary was made, was the copy probably given to the Sikkimese at the time of the signing of the original document. As it is a copy there are numerous scribal errors, which add to the general complexity of the text. There are also large lacunae which can be seen in the extract below. The treaty is presented in summarised form as given the length of the document it is not possible to present a full translation and edited transliteration of the document here.

The document begins with a preamble which states that despite the fact that the Sikkimese government wrote to Labrang (Tashilhunpo) about the dispute a suitable resolution has not been arrived at and so the various events relating to the disputes have been presented in the document in a series of clauses. The first clause states the primary reason for the series of disputes. It states that in 1849 Campbell, who held office in Darjeeling, and Hooker had entered Sikkim as they had been given authority by the British government [in Calcutta] to conduct a survey of the border regions. On account of that they illegally crossed the Sikkimese border with Tibet and entered regions under the authority of Gam pa rdzong. [The Sikkimese Chancellor probably fearing Tibetan retribution arrested the two British men and imprisoned them]. This led the British to annex the Sikkimese estates on the north Bengal plains, which led the Sikkimese government to lose Rs. 46,000 in taxation revenue. As a result of which the Tibetan Government compensated the Sikkimese with an annual stipend of 1000 \textit{khal} of grain, salt and other produce. [Payment of this stipend was the responsibility of Gam pa rdzong.] However, the stipend has been discontinued and the Sikkimese wanted this to be reinstated.

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\(^7\) This was ceded to Britain by the Treaty of Nanking signed in 1842.
\(^8\) The Convention of Peking signed in 1860.
The next clauses (clauses 2 and 3) deal with suspected murder cases. Clause two details a case in which thirty people from Lachen (in north Sikkim) had fled from Lachen to Gam pa to avoid harassment from Gorkha soldiers. However, the Lachenpas were arrested by the authorities in Gam pa and subsequently died in custody. Thereafter Yug gnam lcags [Sikkimese military official] who was travelling to Tashilhunpo for pilgrimage and offerings, held a meeting with the people from Rong [in Gam pa], who misinformed Yug gnam lcags regarding the legal process for murders. As the Sikkimese official was misled, the Sikkimese now (i.e. in 1867) requires that they are compensated for those murders. Clause three notes the death of two people from Lachung in North Sikkim, who were in Khra tshang in Southern Tibet.

Clause four details a series of land disputes between Sikkim and Gam pa. These disputes began when a group of people from Gam pa crossed the border and travelled

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9 Yug gnam lcags was the son of Phyag m dzod Gar dbang head of the influential ‘Bar phung family.
as far south as Lachen rgya ‘u thang$^{10}$ as a result the Sikkimese sent a petition to Tashilhunpo complaining about the illegal crossing. However, the officials of Tashilhunpo responded to the Sikkimese petition claiming that all territory North of Lachen valley belongs to Tashilhunpo [i.e. that it formed part of Gam pa rdzong]. Subsequently a representative from Tashilhunpo claimed the region of Mdzes mo and that at a later time even the region of Mon snying was claimed by a Labrang official called Dpal ‘byor. On account of these land disputes the Sikkimese king referred the case to the Lhasa authorities.

Clause five notes that in 1864 a minor aristocrat, who held pasture lands in Gam pa, recognised some irregularities in the use of his pasture lands and made a petition to Tashilhunpo. It was subsequently decided that Sikkimese nomads can reside in the region of Lha mo ‘dung for one month in the autumn but once the first snows arrive the nomads are not allowed to go past a certain place. When the Sikkimese nomads are not residing on the aristocrats pasture lands, the aristocrat is forbidden from allowing others the use of his lands, but once the Sikkimese have left the lands the aristocrat can pasture his private livestock for the rest of the year. Similarly during the winter grazing is permitted for one month, but the borders of the pasture lands cannot be crossed and once the month is over the nomads must leave the place. In addition the aristocrat has had his rights over the pasture lands in Lha lung extended from one month and five days to one month and twenty days. It has been agreed that the aristocrat and the Sikkimese nomads must abide by this decision but if the nomads from Lachen wish to appeal [in times of special circumstances] they must submit an application to Labrang directly.

Clause six is about an unpaid loan of 27 zho, which must now be paid to the Sikkimese King. Clause seven notes that the Lho nag pastures (north of the current Sikkim-Tibet border) belongs to the Sikkimese government and that the past annual tax payments of 20 sheep, 20 measures of butter, 20 loads of wool, 20 measures of mutton, 20 ‘bo$^{11}$ (1 ‘bo is equal to five ‘bre) of salt as well as chang and other items which were halted by the people of Gam pa should now be re-continued.

Clause eight is about the southern border pasture lands of Sa dkar kyang shong$^{12}$ Phrag nag ‘gugs chen, Rol g.yas, Sa dkar mo, and Yob bde. It notes that a person from Gam pa was using these lands illegally and that he must return the payment for this. It also states that the taxes that have been collected from the common people of these regions should be used to provide border security. It is also agreed that it is acceptable that the 15 households, whose taxes were designated as the donations for rituals which are for the benefit of the mchod yon relationship, be allowed to remain as nomads since farming did not prove profitable for them. Two households from the

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$^{10}$ Whilst nomads from Gam pa were allowed to pasture animals in Sikkim they were not permitted to go as far south as the valley of Lachen.

$^{11}$ This is equal to 5 khal

$^{12}$ Literally: The valley of the wild as and white earth.
have started paying their taxes to Ser rtogs monastery; this has been agreed as acceptable as it is still a contribution to the dharma. It has also been decreed that with the exception of those taxes of butter, wood and money raised during the summer months, Sikkim and Gam pa should not raise other taxes [on these regions] and that these rules regarding tax collection should never be changed. In 1831 The Sikkimese king issued a decree to the public in which it stated that the border people who are residing in Sikkim must follow the laws that were previously established by the Tibetans regarding border security and adds to this clause that whatever legal structures that were in place before must now be followed.

Clause nine is about a decree issued by the Central Tibetan government and the Ambans\textsuperscript{13} in 1863. The decree restricted cross-border trade on all of Tibet’s borders and involved the screening of traders, by local officials, on the grounds of health and character. Under that law if local border officials considered traders to be of ill health and bad character he could prevent the individual from crossing the border. When Gam pa rdzong sent this decree to the Sikkimese government, the Sikkimese sent a complaint asking why the Lachen and Lachung people were put under such unprecedented restrictions and requested that this case be investigated with the view towards granting exemption to Sikkimese nomads who have always traditionally crossed the border. Gam pa rdzong now claims that the law was not meant to be implemented on Lachen and Lachungpas but was sent to Sikkim for their information. It has been agreed that Sikkimese nomads may freely cross the border without harassment. [the implication of this clause is that the Sikkimese nomads may have felt difficulties from people in Gam pa, who used the 1863 law as a reason to harass the Sikkimese nomads on account of the general hostility between Sikkim and Gam pa].

Clause ten begins with a statement that there exists an agreement between the Sikkimese and Tibetans, which prohibits theft and conflict. However, in contravention of this agreement there was a border conflict in Gam pa resulting in the death of up to 40 people from Lachen and Lachung. On the 8\textsuperscript{th} day of the 8\textsuperscript{th} month of the Water Pig Year the Sikkimese presented evidence implicating the perpetrator of these crimes. However, the authorities of Gam pa failed to apprehend the man responsible. As a result of which, the accused, who is named as Don ‘grub, stole a horse (which belonged to a Sikkimese subject) and went to Darjeeling via Walung to sell the stolen horse. The official response from Gam pa at that time was that Don ‘grub had passed away prior to the theft of the horse and so was never in Walung. This was disputed by the people of Lachen, who stated that they can provide an oath stating that Don ‘grub was in Lachen. The Sikkimese requires that they are compensated for the murders and theft.

Clause eleven is about the failure of nomads to abide by the customs regarding the use of pasture lands. In the 11\textsuperscript{th} month of the Iron Monkey Year (1860) a person

\textsuperscript{13} In the Tibetan this reads as rgya bod, which is literally China and Tibet, but clearly refers to the Manchu presence in Lhasa and the office of the Amban.
arrived at the Southern Tibetan pasture lands and stole dry wood. In the commotion some items were thrown into the river, resulting in the death of the eldest daughter of one of the nomadic families. In addition 200 male and female yaks, which belong to the nomads who paid taxes to the Central government, died. The animals that survived were placed under the authority of the person from Bung ru and this has been witnessed by all the representatives. The case of the dead nomadic woman was contested by Lha lung pa, who claimed that the woman had actually died at least one year prior to the incident mentioned above. The resolution is that this sort of thing should not happen again and that the customary laws regarding the use of pasture lands on the Sikkim-Tibet border should be continued as they were before.

Clause twelve recounts an event that took place whilst some people from Lachung were in Khra tshang for the purpose of trade. During their stay in Khra tshang the Lachungpas were attacked, beaten and stabbed resulting in serious injuries. The authorities of Gam pa failed to inform the Sikkimese government of this event and the Sikkimese demand an explanation as to why this was the case. It is resolved that there will be an investigation into the incident and it will be judged according to the law.

Clause thirteen is about a case of horse rustling in the Sikkimese royal estate of mDo khra by the ex-Chamberlain and the steward of Gam pa called dBang rgyal. The case was settled in Gam pa but the result of the settlement was not communicated to the Sikkimese government. The Gam pa authorities claim that the agreement was made with the Sikkimese governor (mgo dpon) [of mDo khra]. The Sikkimese requests an investigation into this case.

Clause fourteen is about a case of defrauding Sikkimese traders. This clause notes that there existed an agreement in which prices for goods were set. Generally the people of Rong (in southern Gam pa) have failed to pay the correct prices for goods, but more specifically dBang rgyal, from the old rdzong, failed to pay for the wood he bought. As a result it is agreed that an investigation should take place.

Clause fifteen is about a list of outstanding loans that was submitted by Ba ri Lama to Gam pa rdzong. Gam pa failed to take action against those who had defaulted on their loans. The Sikkimese argued that the authorities of Gam pa should collect the interest on those loans and pay them to the government. The Gam pa representative claimed that, whilst they agree that they did not fully investigate the issue, they did order the debtors to pay the money owed to Sikkim. The Gam pa authorities claimed that they had indeed sent a list of the money collected to Sikkim and that the Sikkimese government know of this letter. The Sikkimese refused to acknowledge this was the case and sent a petition for mediation of this dispute.15

Clause sixteen is about a tax collector (who is given the title Lo grong dpon nub) who was accused of illegally raising the taxation levels. This was in spite of the fact that numerous letters were sent regarding the illegal tax rises and he continued to

14 This is located in gTing skyes rdzong
15 This clause has no specific resolution.
raise taxes even though they were against the laws issued by the Panchen Lama. As a result of this the Sikkimese requested an investigation. The Gam pa authorities dispute this and claim that the tax collector had been authorised to raise taxes by the Rinpoche. It ends by stating that it is important to dissolve this issue like ice melting in water and think of each other as family members.

The seventeenth clause discusses a case in which a Lachen pa named rDo bsam grazed his animals in Lho nag, which the people of Gra lung claimed was illegal. As a result the people of Gra lung said that rDo bsam should give two dry-cows16 to them. So Gra lung sent a person three times to collect the cows but did not receive them. Then bSod nams bkra shis (from Lachen) sent a request to Gra lung and so it was agreed that in lieu of the cows 15 gold coins could be sent. It is then stated somewhat sarcastically that as this agreement was made without reference to each party’s lord, that those parties must have been given some sort of special authority by Tashilhunpo or Lhasa to make such agreements. It is agreed that clarification of this case is needed as the implication of the text is that the agreement was illegal as it lacked official authority. It is agreed that if a decision is not made regarding this dispute, the actions of some bad people may, in the future, cause suffering amongst the common public which may cause the common people to lose faith in the Lama-Patron system and so two impartial mediators will be appointed to resolve this dispute.

There then follows the signatory section of the agreement. It states that during the time after the death of the Panchen Lama, the Sikkimese king and ministers were dissatisfied and that they were right to be upset. And so for the purpose of clarifying this dispute and for ensuring that it is solved in its totality the following people on the 25th day of the 9th month of the Fire Hare Year (1867) have affixed their seals. The seal of the Sikkimese representative, the former mGron gnyer of Sikkim [mGron gnyer nram rgyal], the seal of the representative of Lha rdzong, the representative of Tashilhunpo, the seal of the two rdzong dpon of Gam pa rdzong,17 the seals of the two mediators from Phag ri18 together with the secretary.

UNDERSTANDING THE DISPUTE

It is clear that the primary reason for the disputes between Sikkim and Gam pa revolve around issues of taxation and pasture land usage. However, the contexts of the disputes are the international changes that occurred as a result of the growing British presence in the Himalaya. In 1835 the British acquired the Darjeeling tract, an area of approximately 357 square kilometres, from the Sikkimese state. The enclave of Darjeeling was totally surrounded by Sikkimese territory on all sides, with the closest

16 This refers to a cow which cannot produce milk.
17 Note that there was in fact only one rdzong dpon of Gam pa of the 5th rank
18 It is unclear if these signatories were the actual rdzong dpon of Phag ri. Phag ri had two rdzong dpon[s] of the 5th rank.
British territory being Rangpur Division\textsuperscript{19} in modern Bangladesh, which served as the base of operations for British expansion in Assam and the Himalaya.\textsuperscript{20} However, by the 1840s hostility between the British in Darjeeling and the Sikkimese increased. This was, until the recent discovery of the Palace Archive, understood as resulting from disagreements regarding the migration of Sikkimese subjects to Darjeeling and the flight of ‘criminals’ from Darjeeling to Sikkim. In addition to this well know problem, documents from the Sikkimese palace archive suggests that Campbell was also attempting to extend British control in the North Bengal plains, by raising taxes in the communities around modern Bagdogra and Naxalbari (Mullard in press). Tax collectors from these Sikkimese estates wrote a number of letters to the Sikkimese crown regarding these activities, which resulted in decreased taxation revenue for the Sikkimese government (see PD/1.1/037).\textsuperscript{21} This hostility ultimately came to a head when the Sikkimese Lord Chamberlain (\textit{mgron gnyer}) captured Hooker and Campbell in the winter of 1849; an event recorded in the Gam pa-Sikkim agreement above. This angered the British authorities as it seriously damaged their prestige and led to the annexation of all Sikkimese territory south of the Rangit River; an area of land equivalent to 3149 square kilometres.\textsuperscript{22} In addition the British halted their annual payments for Darjeeling which, combined with the loss of the fertile India plains territories, an area which had hitherto provided the bulk of Sikkimese tax revenue (Mullard in press), and which the Sikkimese claimed amounted to an annual loss of Rs. 46,000 as mentioned in the agreement above: a figure which amounts to a relative value of approximately Rs. 16 million today.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{19} In colonial times the eight districts of Rangpur Division were known as Rungpore. Technically the district closest to Darjeeling was the Panchagarh district, which is one of the eight districts of modern Rangpur Division.

\textsuperscript{20} Further details of British involvement in Assam and the events leading up to the suppression of Assam see \textit{Memoir of the late David Scott esq. Agent to the Governor General, on the North East Frontier of Bengal}, compiled by Major A. White in 1832. Scott’s expertise in Jungle warfare which he practiced on the Garo people of modern Meghalaya, was later used by the British in the conquest of Burma. Although Scott died young he was primarily responsible for extending British control over Assam and was also responsible for correspondence between Sikkim and British India prior to 1830.

\textsuperscript{21} There were also cases where officials of the Sikkimese state resided in British Indian territory but collected revenue and taxes from Sikkimese lands as is noted in PD/1.1/039.

\textsuperscript{22} For details of this event see McKay forthcoming and the Gazetteer of Sikkim (21)

\textsuperscript{23} This is based on a calculation of the relative value of the Indian Rupee of 1850 as Rs. 352.91, which itself is based on the value of GDP per capita over the time period. Using GDP per capita is more useful than using changes in the relative value of silver (the Rupee was a silver standard currency) as silver prices fell dramatically from 1871-1893, with the discovery of silver reserves in the USA. This led to a devaluation of the rupee as it was pegged to pound sterling which was a gold standard currency. If one were to use different measurements of relative value 1 1850s rupee would equal the following amounts in today’s currency: GDP deflator = Rs. 114.96; nominal GDP = Rs. 1,229.28.
In one document (PD/1.1/040) compiled in 1846, three years prior to the arrest of Hooker and Campbell, the tax revenue for ten villages in the plains is recorded as being Rs. 19,324 6 anna and 5 paise, which is approximately 42% of the total loss of revenue stated in the Gam pa-Sikkim agreement. The villages named in this particular document are in the region of the Nepal-Indian Bengal border (encompassing an area from modern Bagdogra to Kharibari along Highway 31C), which was annexed by the British in 1850. Given that the figure noted in PD/1.1/040 make up a considerable portion of the lost tax revenue it seems clear that the figure of Rs. 46,000 mentioned in the Gam pa-Sikkim agreement is certainly plausible and may even be underestimated. Given that the figure of Rs. 46,000 is within the realm of possibility it is clear that loss of such a sum would have severely burdened the Sikkimese government and thus added an additional strain on Sikkimese-British relationships.

It is clear from the above document that the Sikkimese informed the Tibetans of the developments in 1849-50, which in turn resulted in the compensation payments from Gam pa. In ‘Bras ljongs rgyal rabs’ (173-175) it clearly states that these payments were granted by the Tibetan government and that an agreement regarding the use of pasture lands was made between Tashilhunpo and Sikkim. However, when the fourth Panchen Lama died in 1853, Gam pa began defaulting on their taxation payments to Sikkim (BGR: 173-175). This was probably due to the fact that the tax burden was extremely high as is noted in a number of documents from the Sikkimese Palace Archive for other areas of Tibet with joint taxation obligations. In one such document (PD/1.1/004)25 the people of Chumbi complain about the extremely heavy tax burden raised by both Sikkimese and Tibetan authorities on the people of the region, which led many common subjects to flee the region. It has already been mentioned in Goldstein (1968: 28) that the risk of Tibetan commoners fleeing their lands as a result of over taxation was very real and had resulted in the introduction of the Fire Sheep Land settlement, which was intended to reduce such a risk.

In the Gam pa-Sikkim agreement the issue of the tax burden is discussed a number of times. Clause eight, for example, prohibits both the Sikkimese and Gam pa authorities from introducing any form of new taxes and from increasing the levels of taxation beyond those taxes mentioned in the clause. The issue of illegal tax rises is also mentioned in clause 16, where a tax collector is accused of raising taxation illegally. Whereas the failure to pay taxes is the key theme in clause six.

It may be the case that the different disputes noted in the agreement resulted from the increased financial burden placed on the common people of Gam pa by the agreement of the Tibetan authorities to grant the Sikkimese taxation and pasture land rights. As if these regions were still required to pay taxes to the Labrang of Tashilhunpo the tax burden might have been too great for the common people, causing hostility

24 Hereafter BGR
25 This has been dated as 1796 in the catalogue though it is clear that this letter was written in 1856
between the people of Gam pa and north Sikkimese traders and nomads. Thus many of
the other clauses which detail hostility, violence (in some cases murder) and theft
between the local inhabitants of north Sikkim and Gam pa must be seen as a direct
consequence of the increased financial burden placed on the common people of Gam
pa. Therefore, the decisions taken at the macro-relationship level as represented as the
relations between the governments of Lhasa, Tashilhunpo and Sikkim had implications
on the relationships between, not only the common people of both Sikkim and Gam pa,
but also on the relationships between Gam pa and Tashilhunpo and North Sikkim and
the Sikkimese state. It is safe to say that whilst the decisions to grant Sikkim special
rights in Gam pa helped to alleviate some of the financial burden the Sikkimese
government felt as a result of losing its territories in the plains, they ultimately placed
strained on the people of southern Tibet, which in turn affected the localised relations
between nomads and traders on both sides of the Tibet-Sikkim border.

If indeed this was the case two questions arise. Firstly, why, if southern Tibet was
being over taxed, did Tibetan authorities in both Tashilhunpo and Lhasa agree to give
special rights to the Sikkimese; and secondly, why was the agreement particularly
favourable to the Sikkimese? The answer to both these questions lies, ultimately, in
the historical context of the time. The traditional relationships between Tibet and
Sikkim noted above were in the process of changing dramatically as a result of British
expansion in the Himalaya. Only six years prior to the signing of the Sikkim-Gam pa
agreement the British led by Lt. Gawler and Ashley Eden invaded Sikkim and forced
the Sikkimese Chos rgyal to sign a treaty which in affect gave the British a significant
amount of control over Sikkim.26 Similarly in Tibet, the twelfth Dalai Lama was in
his minority and the Amban wielded considerable influence over the government in
Lhasa. Given the Qing experience of British underhand dealings in the opium trade
and fears of British expansionism in mainland China, it is well known that these fears
percolated down to the Manchu Amban in Lhasa, leading to the policy of excluding
Europeans from Tibet. These fears were confirmed when the British, having received
Darjeeling in 1835, annexed the remaining Sikkimese territory south of the Rangit in
1850. As the Qing understood Tibetan-Sikkimese relations in terms of the politics of
subsumation (that is Sikkim was considered to be a tributary of Tibet and thus the
Qing Empire) and in light of recent developments in Canton following the first Opium
War, it is conceivable to assume that the Ambans wanted the Tibetans to shore up
Sikkim as a bulwark against British expansion into China via Tibet. It is thus likely
that the reason for granting Sikkimese rights in Gam pa resulted from such concerns.
Similarly the decisions in the Sikkim-Gam pa agreement and the general favourable
outcome for Sikkim should also be understood within this wider context of ensuring
the territorial integrity of Sikkim against British expansion. This wider political
context thus influenced the outcome of the disputes as whilst it is possible to state that

26 For details see Moktan (ed) 2004: 12-16 for a copy of the Treaty of Tumlong signed in 1861
and McKay (forthcoming)
land and tax disputes happened frequently in Tibet, this particular dispute was politicised by the British presence in former Sikkimese territory and that the disputes occurred on the Sikkim-Tibet border: a region that was a serious concern for Tibetan and Manchu authorities alike. Indeed this concern is reflected in PD/9.5/065 in which the Amban writes to the Sikkimese king that a representative must be sent to Gro mo to discuss how the border must be secured. That document also contains a short note in which it states that whatever the Sikkimese raise regarding the relations on the Tibet-Sikkim border will be agreed to by the Amban. This document provides interesting contextual information regarding the Qing preoccupation with maintaining the security of the Tibetan border.

**Concluding Remarks**

The Sikkim-Gam pa agreement provides an insight into the nature of relations that existed between not only the common people of Sikkim and Gam pa but also the governments of Sikkim and Tashilhunpo and to a certain extent that of Lhasa and the Amban. What is clear from this brief presentation of the Sikkim-Gam pa dispute is that financial pressures placed on Sikkim by the British annexation of its territories in the plains had a knock on affect for the people of southern Tibet. Clearly Tibetan authorities, either out of compassion for the Sikkimese losses or, more likely fear that Sikkim may become a British spring-board to Tibet in the same way that Hong Kong became a region for British activities in mainland China, provided Sikkim with compensatory payments of grain, pasture land access, and other forms of revenue. By so doing the taxation obligations of the people of Southern Tibet were dramatically increased leading to hostility and violence towards the Sikkimese and ultimately resulted in the failure to provide these source of revenue to Sikkim. Whilst the decision to grant the Sikkimese tax rights on account of the loss of Sikkimese taxable estates to the British, may have been made to solidify relations between Sikkim and Tibet at a macro level it ultimately had a detrimental effect on the localised relations on the Tibet-Sikkim border. In this particular period of Tibetan and Sikkimese relations the border between the two countries was an area of real political concern particularly after the rise of British interest in the Himalaya and it is probably for this reason that the disputes were resolved in a way to favour the Sikkimese.

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27 It should be noted that Manchu pressure applied to Tibetan authorities in order to prevent British involvement in Tibet and the Himalaya was at its height during this period on account of increased hostility to the British after the two Opium Wars of 1839-42 and 1856-60. During those Wars the British invaded Canton and secured the island of Hong Kong as a Crown colony by the treaty of Nanking. The colony was extended to include Kowloon peninsula following the second Opium War.
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