17 The Scramble for China Continues: Guangzhouwan and Tibet

France became a full partner in all of this, guarding and expanding its interest in southern China. In early 1897, when the Anglo-Chinese Agreement of February of that year was finalised, it gained a guarantee from China that the island of Hainan (which, some had speculated at the time of the Sino-French War of 1884-85, the French would claim after victory) and its adjacent coast would not be ceded or leased to another power; a promise that was not put into writing, probably to prevent other powers from coming to similar arrangements (Scott 1885: 329; Chandran 1977: 260). The following year, this time in reaction to the loan Great Britain and Germany were to provide to China to pay its war indemnity to Japan, France sought a pledge from China that Keng Hung, and Yunnan, Guangxi and Guangdong would not be ceded or leased to another power.[1] The Anglo-Russian Agreement Respecting Spheres of Influence in China of April 1899 also called for a reaction. The French Foreign Office drafted a proposal for a French sphere of influence in China to serve as a starting point for negotiations with London. The region France had in mind consisted of East and South Yunnan, Guangxi and East Guangdong. Guangdong's capital Guangzhou should have a neutral status (Chandran 1977: 303).

A foothold in China was also on the French agenda. This had taken concrete form at the beginning of 1896 when the French government adopted the suggestion by the Commander of the French Far Eastern Squadron, Admiral de la Bonnière de Beaumont, that in view of the distance between Saigon and Vladivostok France needed a coaling facility along the Chinese coast, preferably at the Bay of Guangzhou or Guangzhouwan (Kwangchowan, Kwang-chou-wan, or for the French Quang Tchéou Wan) in Guangdong, located roughly opposite Haiphong. After the ratification of the Anglo-German loan to China of March 1898, Paris pressed on and entered into negotiations with China over the lease of a coaling station on the same conditions Germany had acquired its station in Jiaozhou (ibid.: 271).

On 10 April 1898, a week after Great Britain had leased Wei-hai-wei, a ninety-nine-year lease of Guangzhouwan was agreed upon, becoming effective on 27 May. France also received, what Lorin (1906: 364-5) called,

1 This, in turn, would make London seek a pledge that China would not alienate to France Guangdong, Yunnan and the 'Yangtze' province of Guizhou (Chandran 1971: 63-4,1977: 271-2).

vague preferential rights in a wider region, including the port city of Beihai (Pakhoi) on the north coast of the Gulf of Tonkin and the Island of Hainan. Included in the deal was a railway from Beihai to the West River; but, as the French historian Lorin (1906: 364) significantly wrote, in view of the French desire to have Tonkin remain the main avenue of trade with south China this was, in reality, a matter of 'non-construction', mentioned in order to keep rivals out and prevent other powers from building the line. On top of this, the French right to build a railway from Tonkin to Kunming, already mentioned in the Franco-Chinese Complementary Commercial Convention of 1895, was reconfirmed; all in the name of 'closer bonds of friendship'.[2] Soon the French came to regret that they had not leased Hainan as well. Apart from being a source of cheap labour, another power taking possession of the island was seen as a security risk for Indochina (Chambre 1898: xii). When, in 1902, German warships appeared in Hainan, the French, as Cunningham (1902: 26-7) observed, 'became curiously excited' by these ships in their 'zone', sending a cruiser to investigate. Cunningham could agree with such a course of action: 'Germany in possession of Hainan would indeed be, and rightly enough, an impossible situation to the French'.

Guangzhouwan, which came to be administered by the Governor-General of Indochina, was intended, in the words of Lorin (1906: 43), as 'a naval station and point of economic penetration'. It was to serve, Doumer (1905: 44) noted, as an advance position of a French move forwards into the northern waters of China and Japan. Doumer, as mentioned a passionate expansionist, was pleased with the new acquisition; though he was a little apprehensive about the turbulent disposition of the Chinese population. He was certain that Guangzhouwan would become one of France's 'great national naval establishments' and saw 'a brilliant future for it as a port of commerce'. Allowing France to penetrate deeply into south China, into Guangdong and Guangxi and the West River basin, Guangzhouwan would 'drain the products of an immense region' (Cunningham 1902: 7). Although a drawback was that it was difficult to defend, other French officials, among them Rear Admiral Édouard Pottier, Commander of the French Far Eastern Squadron, agreed that Guangzhouwan had been a good choice for the location of a naval base (ibid.: 8). As was the case with Jiaozhou, coal was nearby. One of its assets was that Guangzhouwan was located one day's sailing from the coalfields of Hongay in Tonkin. Convinced of

2 Agreement in regard to a concession to build a railway from Tongking to Yunnan, the lease of Kuang-chou-wan, and the organisation of the Chinese postal service, 10-4-1898 (www.chinaforeignrelations.net/node/170, accessed 20-6-2012).

the future of the new possessions, France started to build a commercial seaport, Fort-Bayard (Zhanjiang). It did so even before trade had started. Unlike ports in Indochina, Guangzhouwan was to be a free port. This status added to Doumer's confidence. As he wrote initially, 'the absence of customs … the entire liberty allowed to ships of commerce, which will have no duties whatever to pay nor formalities to fulfil, tend to make it soon one of the principal entrepôts of the Far East' (ibid.: 23). A few years later, Doumer (1905: 294) had to admit that after being in French possession for about five years, not much had yet been done to facilitate its development. Guangzhouwan's fate would be not dissimilar to that of Wei-hai-wei; an acquisition of almost no use.

In response to the French leasing Guangzhouwan, Great Britain expanded its territory in Hong Kong. Under the Convention respecting an Extension of Hong Kong Territory of 9 June 1898, also known as the Second Convention of Beijing, it acquired a ninety-nine-year lease of the so-called New Territories, a strip of land of some 350 square miles adjacent to the territory the British already had on Kowloon Peninsula (Hong Kong Island was some 30 square miles). One reason was the desire to improve the defences of the colony, but the fear that it would become French also played a role (Eitel 1895: 359). France, Curzon said in the House of Commons, was piqued that this addition to British territory in China had hardly received any attention at all, 'a concession which the British community in Hong Kong have been agitating, appealing, and praying for for years'. Had it gone to another European power, Members of Parliament 'would have cried out … that British prestige had suffered an irreparable disaster'.[3] The extension had been on the British agenda since June 1895 when it had been mentioned as compensation for China handing over part of Keng Hung to France (Chandran 1977: 154). And, in January 1898, when the British Cabinet in response to the German and Russian moves to occupy Jiaozhou and Port Arthur decided that it would not seek a territorial concession from China, an exception had been made for the Peninsula. It was not only said that the land was essential for the defence of Hong Kong, by claiming it Great Britain wanted to forestall France forcing China to declare it would not alienate the strip of land to any power (ibid.: 272-3). When, in April 1899, the British tried to take formal possession of the New Territories things did not go as smoothly as they might have hoped. Troops had to be deployed to suppress resistance by the local population against the extension of Hong Kong's territory.

3 Curzon in House of Commons 2-8-1898 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/1898/aug/02/civil-service-estimates).

The last country to join in the quest for Chinese soil was Italy; its international standing was stained by its military defeat by Ethiopia in 1896. In February 1899 Rome tried to lease Sanmen (San Mun) Bay near Shanghai, sending a squadron of cruisers to China to enforce its demand. Italy sought railway concessions as well. In a rare gesture of defiance, the Chinese government returned the note in which the request was made unopened. In Europe such a response was taken as a diplomatic affront. Salisbury was of the opinion that a reprimand was in order. China had the right to decide whether or not to lease territory to a foreign country, but returning a diplomatic letter unopened was not done. It was 'most discourteous' (Xiang 2003: 87-8). The Italian attempt was the only incursion China successfully resisted.

The Boxer Rebellion

It was in northwest Shandong, not in the German part of the peninsula, that just over a year after the German occupation of Jiaozhou the Boxer Rebellion started; spreading via Zhili to Beijing, spilling over into Manchuria, and also causing some trouble in Wei-hai-wei.[4] As Esherick (1987: 271) has argued, the unrest initially was anti-Christian in nature with the anti-foreign element coming to the fore 'at a very late stage'. The Boxers also protested the recent land concessions Beijing had been forced to make. Initially, the powers underestimated the seriousness of what was happening. In March 1900 a suggestion by French Foreign Secretary Delcassé for a joint naval demonstration in the Bohai Sea was turned down by Great Britain, Germany and the United States; all preferring a wait-and-see attitude and with the United States reluctant to enter into any formal cooperation with another power. A joint protest, let alone the idea of joint military action, was contrary to American policy. As Secretary of State John Milton Hay informed the American envoy in China, even when the United States had 'to act on lines similar to those other treaty powers follow, it should do so singly and without the cooperation of other powers'.[5] In Beijing the turmoil culminated in the fifty-five-day siege of the foreign legations, starting on 20 June 1900, just hours after the German minister, Klemens Baron von

4 Brodrick in House of Commons (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/11-5-1900/wei-hai-wei- attack-on-the-british-demarcation-commission).

5 Silbey 2012: 60, 93-4; *New York Times* 10-11-1900 quoting from documents released by the French Government.

Ketteler, on his way to the Chinese Foreign Affairs Board, was murdered by a Manchu Lance Corporal in full uniform.

An initial international relief force to Beijing, headed by British Vice-Admiral Sir Edward Hobart Seymour, which had left Tianjin ten days earlier, failed; confronted as it was by heavy resistance from Chinese troops, some well-armed with quick-firing Krupp rifles. For the Japanese to expand their participation London literally had to pay a price. Tokyo, still angry that it had been forced to retreat from the Liaodong Peninsula in 1895, and in need of funds, demanded and received a large sum of money – one million British pounds – from Great Britain in early July (Drea 2009: 98). A new eight-nation expedition force was constituted with Japan, Russia, Great Britain and Germany providing most of the troops. The United States also participated, albeit hesitantly, with Washington zealously guarding its right to develop a China policy independent of and different from that of other powers. Consequently, the commander of a small contingent of American troops in China had been instructed to 'avoid entering into any joint action or undertaking with other powers tending to commit or limit this Government as to its future course of conduct' (Silbey 2012: 129).

The city of Tianjin, where since the middle of June the foreign settlement and foreign troops stationed there had been besieged by a combined force of Chinese soldiers and Boxer rebels, was taken on 14 July. It took until 4 August when the expeditionary force departed from Tianjin. On 14 August the first troops entered the legation compound. During the final days of the march national sentiments flared up in the international force; as they already had during Seymour's failed expedition and during the attack on the Dagu forts in June. Anticipating that before forcing their way into the city the national anthems were to be played under Beijing's city walls, the French general ordered his troops to sing theirs as loudly as possible (Fleming 1989: 194). It also became a matter of pride and honour who would be the first to enter the city (the Russians) and the foreign compound (the British) and not to lose the race (as the French and the Germans did). For the Japanese, not very eager to join in with countries responsible for the Triple Intervention of 1895, but swayed by the opportunity to gain international prestige and a handsome amount of British money, joining the expedition offered a theatre to show the world, as its commanders intended to, how well-disciplined and courageous Japanese soldiers could be (Fleming 1989: 133; Drea 2009: 98). The foreign soldiers wrought havoc, killing and destroying at will, and looting what they could, an activity in which missionaries also enthusiastically participated; creating even stronger xenophobic feelings (Esherick 1987: 310).

Though the Boxer Rebellion was confined to the north of China there were also international complications in Shanghai where the rivalry between the powers in China was enacted in miniature. Using the prospect of disturbances as a justification, the British, spearheaded by the secretary of the local branch of the China Association, J.O.P. Bland, saw a chance to gain preponderance by having British troops land in Shanghai. The plan failed when French, German and Japanese soldiers also disembarked. The foreign troops withdrew after two years. Much to the chagrin of Great Britain, Germany used the occasion to obtain a promise from Beijing that no part of the Shanghai Valley would be ceded or leased to another power.[6]

Something similar happened in Xiamen, opposite Taiwan and a likely spot for a Japanese incursion into China. At the end of August, using a fire in a house occupied by a Japanese national as an excuse, Japanese marines from a squadron of four warships landed on the Islands of Xiamen and Gulangyu (the latter the site of the foreign settlement) at the mouth of the Jiulong River in south Fujian. The foreign consuls protested and within days Great Britain, the United States and Germany each directed two warships to Xiamen. France and Russia sent one ship. On the pretext of protecting British interests against possible local unrest British troops also went ashore. They and the Japanese marines only returned to their ships after the American consul had threatened that American marines would disembark as well.

In the meantime, preparations had been made in Europe, the United States and Japan to send reinforcements to China. The fitting out of an international expeditionary force provided Wilhelm II with the opportunity to show, once again, his more belligerent and racist side. What happened in China excited him; though it will have pleased him less that German troops would only play a minor role in the relief of the foreign legations. Calling for vengeance – and for Beijing to be levelled to the ground – he ordered the sending of a German expeditionary force of about thirty thousand soldiers and marines to teach the Chinese a lesson they would not forget (Massie 1993: 282). At the end of July 1900, when he saw off the first three troop ships sailing from Bremerhaven to the Far East, he held his infamous *Hunnenrede* (Hun speech), which attracted attention all over the world for its 'unchristian words', as a newspaper in the Netherlands Indies, *De Locomotief* (11-8-1900) put it. He begged the German soldiers to act without mercy when confronted with the enemy:

6 Satow to Grey 27-12-1905 (PRO FO 800 44).

Figure 23 Field Marshal von Waldersee reviewing troops in Beijing

Source: Casserly 1903

> Meet him and beat him! Give him no quarter! Take no prisoners! Kill him when he falls into your hands! Even as, a thousand years ago, the Huns under their King Attila made such a name for themselves as still resounds in legend and fable, so may the name of Germans resound through Chinese history a thousand years from now... (Massie 1993: 282).[7]

With this speech he gave the Germans, thirty years after the birth of the German Empire, a term of abuse by which their enemies could refer to them: the Huns. His soldiers were to behave accordingly.

Wilhelm II was determined to have his country play a prominent role in punishing China. Earlier, in June, when the initial relief force had to be organised, Great Britain had involved only Russia and Japan in the negotiations, leaving out Germany (Silbey 2012: 121). No doubt piqued by this and using the killing of Ketteler in Beijing as a supportive arguments, Wilhelm II set out to have a German officer take supreme command of the international force. His effort was bolstered by the animosity between Japan and Russia, contesting each other's influence in Manchuria and Korea, and adamant that the position should not go to a rival officer (Silbey 2012: 143).

7 The German text can be found, among other places, in Gründer 1999: 167-9.

He succeeded in persuading the Russian Tsar to nominate Field Marshal Alfred Count von Waldersee for this position and the Japanese to second the proposal (Fleming 1989: 179). Reluctantly, Great Britain and France agreed, neither very keen to take command themselves, as did the United States. Wilhelm II sent a telegram to the American President, writing that he was pleased that German and American soldiers would 'fight together for the common cause of civilisation' and praising the American army 'which has shown of late [in Cuba and the Philippines] so many warlike qualities'.[8] On 18 August 1900, presenting Waldersee with the Field-Marshal's baton, Wilhelm II again held, what Waldersee called, 'a somewhat vivacious address which unfortunately got into the newspapers' (Fleming 1989: 179).

The first reinforcements from Germany arrived in north China in late August, at a time when the foreign legations had already been relieved. Waldersee reached Beijing in October. His expedition was meant to make an impression; a show of soldiership worthy of a world power. Martially, his soldiers entered Beijing, goose-stepping as good German soldiers did. True to his Emperor's words, Waldersee set out to organise merciless punitive expeditions; worrying only about 'our slackness with the Chinese' (ibid.: 253). Germans were pleased with the result. The vigorous action of the German government had greatly contributed to the 'increase of prestige and the strengthening of the Germany's position of power in China', one contemporary German China expert wrote. The fact that 'the German Army and Navy in strength far outshone the other powers' and that Waldersee had been given overall command could not but have made a lasting impression on the Chinese (Zimmermann 1901: 303).

In June 1901 the Chinese Emperor ordered a special delegation headed by his brother Prince Chun to travel to Germany to convey his regrets to Wilhelm II for the killing of Ketteler. As an additional token of remorse, and as a visible sign of humiliation, the Chinese government promised to erect a Ketteler Memorial Arch, in Chinese style, on the spot where the German envoy had been assassinated, expressing the same regret and with the text in Chinese, German and Latin. Its dedication in January 1903 was a grand affair. The ceremony was, *The New York Times* (19-1-1903) reported, 'a brilliant assemblage of diplomats, Chinese officials, all the military officers, the entire foreign community of the city, as well as German officers from Tien-Tsin and other cities'. A similar expression of regret was conveyed to the Japanese government for the killing of Sugiyama Akira, chancellor of the Japanese legation in Beijing in June 1900.

8 Wilhelm II to McKinley 11-8-1900 (*New York Times* 13-8-1900).

The defeated Chinese Empire was forced to sign the so-called Boxer protocol on 7 September 1901. In it a large indemnity was imposed, which the powers partly used to build grand new buildings for their envoys, giving them, as Lawton (1912: 1367) observed, 'far more imposing residences than any of their ambassadors in the chief European capitals'. The legation quarter in Beijing became a foreign enclave guarded by foreign soldiers, where no Chinese were allowed to reside. The Dagu forts guarding the mouth of the Hai (Bai, Pei-ho) River on the coast of the Bohai Sea were to be razed. Trade was not forgotten either. Beijing explicitly had to consent to the improvement of the navigability of the Hai River (on which work had already started in 1898) running from the coast to Beijing and, to the south, of the Huangpu (Whangpoo) River, a tributary of the Yangtze flowing through Shanghai.

Russia made optimal use of the chaos during the days of the Boxer Rebellion. The unrest provided St Petersburg with a good excuse to send troops to Manchuria, ignoring Witte's warning that this might lead to complications with Japan (Wcislo 2011: 184). In September Russian troops occupied Yingkou and other places in Manchuria. To prevent Russia from moving southwards into China proper British troops entered Shanhaiguan. Nevertheless, and in violation of the agreement of April 1899, Russian troops succeeded in gaining control over the railway between Shanhaiguan and Tianjin (Van de Ven 2006: 641). Russia's military penetration in Manchuria was to precede a political and economic one. As British merchants observed, around 1900 Russian trade with Manchuria was still almost non-existent (Beresford 1899: 44-5). In the nearby Chinese treaty port of Yingkou, Russian shipping was said to account for 1/500th of total tonnage, that of Great Britain for half (ibid.: 49-50, 56). In November 1900 the Governor of Russian Manchuria, Admiral E.I. Alexeiev, a staunch exponent of Russian expansion in north Asia, drew up a far-reaching agreement in Shenyang (Mukden) with the Chinese Commander in Manchuria. The treaty gave Russia virtual control of South Manchuria, including Shenyang and the only treaty port, Yingkou. Russia would be free to decide how many troops it wanted to station in South Manchuria and would under certain circumstances be allowed to dismiss Chinese government officials. It would also receive exclusive mining and railway concessions; thus, Japanese, British and American politicians argued, distracting from the equal rights the powers were entitled to in China by treaty. In Great Britain the agreement added to the conviction of those who saw Russia's recruitment of hardy local soldiers as a first step on the way to the conquest of China and India.

The British incursion into Tibet

The Boxer Rebellion and the joint international expedition made the powers rein in their territorial ambitions. Partition became less likely. This did not prevent Great Britain, or rather the Indian government, from exploiting China's weakness to carve out a British sphere of influence in Tibet, a vassal state of China and already for decades striving to gain independence from directives from Beijing. Initially, in the 1870s, London's aim in Tibet had been to expand trade and keep the French out. Later, the concern became to prevent Russia from gaining influence in Tibet, a country characterised (incorrectly) by a Member of Parliament of those days as 'the only territory now left between India and the Russian sphere'.[9]

In negotiations leading to the Yantai (Chefoo) Convention of 1876, which had come in the wake of the disastrous Browne expedition to explore potential trade routes between Burma and southern China, Tibet trade had been introduced by Great Britain out of the blue. The British gained Beijing's permission to send a mission to explore the possibility of trade into Tibet; which, in fact, London was reluctant to undertake out of fear of a repeat of the disaster that had befallen Browne. In July 1886, at China's request, London traded the right to organise such an expedition for China's recognition of the annexation of the Kingdom of Ava. It appears that China in no way wanted such an expedition to take place. In retrospect, Rosebery would single out 'the anguish' with which the Chinese government had asked London to abandon the expedition, and the positive British response, as a main factor in securing the Anglo-Chinese Convention relating to Burma and Thibet of that year (Tibet being included in the convention at the request of China).[10] Reflecting British focus on trade with Tibet, one of its articles read that it was 'the duty of the Chinese Government, after careful inquiry into the circumstances, to adopt measures to exhort and encourage the people [of Tibet] with a view to the promotion and development of trade'.[11]

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Great Britain took a more aggressive stand, afraid as its leading politicians were of the growing Russian influence in Tibet, which in fact might have been considerably less

9 Walton in House of Commons 30-3-1900 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1900/mar/30/british-commercial-and-political-interests-in-china).

10 Rosebery in House of Lords 26-2-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/feb/26/the-mission-to-tibet).

11 Anglo-Chinese Convention relating to Burma and Thibet of July 1886, Art. IV (www.chinaforeignrelations.net/node/148).

Figure 24 Curzon 1904

Source: Landon 1905

than Curzon and others assumed. Decisive action was deemed necessary. In February 1903 Secretary of State for India George Hamilton, who would refer to 'a monkish clique at Lhasa', informed Curzon, Viceroy of India since January 1899, that something had to be done.[12] The order may have come from London, but the British were spurred on by Curzon, a hawk and deeply suspicious of Russian intent for almost his whole life. Indeed, some would blame Curzon for how the Tibet Question would develop, wondering who had taken the lead, Curzon or the government in London.

As the Tibetans had ignored the arrangement between Great Britain and China about their country – their stubbornness attributed in Great Britain to stirring by Russia – Curzon came up with the idea of direct negotiations with the Tibetans on Tibetan soil, in which the Chinese should also participate. In July 1903, after Russia had duly been informed that the British had no intention of annexing or occupying Tibet, and China, equally reassured that the mission would withdraw after 'reparations' had been obtained, had given its permission, British troops marched into Tibet.

12 Hamilton in House of Commons 13-4-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1904/apr/13/east-indian revenues-tibet).

The reasons put forward to justify the expedition – it was called a Political Mission with an armed escort, which implied that no consent from Parliament was necessary for the expedition, financed by the Indian government – were trivial and difficult to defend. This was the case domestically (where in fact the expedition had considerable public support) and abroad, especially in Russia. This time it was the Russians who had to worry about their prestige in Asia, and indignation about an English expedition marching into China was great (Soroka 1911: 81). Trade, especially the export of tea from India, was one reason stated, but not everybody was so convinced that such a trade held great prospects. Even Lansdowne, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (and Governor-General of India from 1888 to 1894), had to admit that what Great Britain wanted to enforce was 'not a very extensive or valuable trade'.[13] Rosebery, a critic, became derisive. People might conclude that Calcutta had embarked on the expedition 'to make people drink Indian tea who do not like Indian tea and do not want Indian tea', he said.[14] Indeed, they preferred to drink tea from Sichuan, not from India.

Then there was the matter of frontiers. Tibetans had removed a number of boundary pillars along the frontier with Sikkim, a Chinese vassal that had become a British protectorate in 1890. Tibetan herds had grazed on Indian soil, while herdsmen and other people from Sikkim had been barred access to the adjacent Chumbi valley. At the root of such acts was the annexation of the Chumbi Valley by Tibet in 1886. The Tibetan invasion in Sikkim in turn had led to a British expedition two years later, resulting in the Anglo-Chinese Convention relating to Sikkim and Tibet of 1890. In December 1893, during negotiations in Calcutta, the Tibet Trade Regulations were annexed to the Convention, which called for, among other things, a trade market at Yatung – 'a sort of free port in the desert', one Member of Parliament would call it[15] – and the abolishment of border duties for five years after the opening of Yatung to trade.[16]

13 Lansdowne in House of Lords 26-2-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/feb/26/the-mission-to-tibet).

14 Rosebery in House of Lords 26-2-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/feb/26/the-mission-to-tibet).

15 Lough in House of Commons 13-4-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1904/apr/13/east-indian revenues-tibet).

16 The Regulations of 1893 regarding trade, communication, and pasturage. Indian tea, it was agreed, could be imported into Tibet 'at a rate of duty not exceeding that at which Chinese tea is imported into England' but export from India would only start after five years (Art. IV).

What irked advocates of the invasion most was that Tibet had not recognised the Anglo-Chinese arrangements regarding their country and that the anti-British and pro-Russian Dalai Lama – who protested that Tibet had not been involved in the negotiations in 1890 and 1893 – had ignored British diplomatic démarches three times, returning letters unopened. It was an insult that, as the Italian case of Sanmen Bay had shown, was not taken lightly. Prime Minister Balfour explained in the House of Commons that 'no cause of offence that ever could be given … could be more than that letters written by the Indian Government to the Tibetan Government should be returned unanswered'.[17]

The affront could not be left to rest. Pride and national honour were at stake. As Landon (1905 I: v), the journalist who accompanied the mission, wrote: 'We who work in India know what prestige means. Throughout the expedition we felt that our national honour was at stake'. Considering this so self-evident that no further explanation was needed, Balfour presented a similar argument. Being belittled by Tibet was bad for British prestige in Nepal and Sikkim.[18] Lhasa had to be taught a lesson. To defend the expedition, Lansdowne argued that he knew of no case in history 'in which a powerful and civilised Power has dealt more patiently or more indulgently with a barbarous or semi-barbarous neighbour'.[19] He and the Secretary of State for India, William St John Fremantle Brodrick, both stressed that British patience had come to an end.

Overriding all other reasons to act were rumours about secret contacts, if not a secret treaty, between Tibet and Russia, engineered by a Russian-born Tibetan monk known by the Russianised name of Agvan Dorjiev; the villain in the British story. He would have tried to convince Lhasa that Russia offered Tibet better protection than China, weak as the latter was (Landon 1905 I: 31). Any Russian influence in Tibet, Balfour explained, resounding the earlier British fear of a Russian-dominated Chinese government in Beijing, would 'be a serious misfortune to the Indian Government, and a danger to our northern frontier'.[20] Brodrick, who had replaced Hamilton as Secretary of State for India in October 1903, just after the start of the expedition, advanced a similar argument. He stressed that a Tibet under the control of

17 Balfour in House of Commons 13-4-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1904/apr/13/east-indian-revenues-tibet).

18 Ibid.

19 Lansdowne in House of Lords 26-2-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/feb/26/the-mission-to-tibet).

20 Balfour in House of Commons 13-4-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1904/apr/13/east-indian revenues-tibet).

Russia was not only very detrimental to Anglo-Tibetan relations, it would also 'cause considerable unrest in Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim'.[21]

Starting in 1898, Dorjiev visited Russia and St Petersburg a number of times, and in 1900 had even been received in an audience by the Tsar. His visits raised the suspicion of London; also because of reports that Russia had asked for a railway concession in Tibet and that 'camel loads' of Russian arms had entered the country (Landon 1905 I: 34). The mention of a railway hit a raw nerve. 'Concessions to construct railways must seem insignificant enough to a country which has not a wheel within its borders except a prayer-wheel', Landon (1905 I: 34) wrote, 'but to the eye of the uncharitable European diplomatists the very mention of railways in connection with Russia calls up a wide field of reminiscence and implication'. Equally unsettling were rumours reported in the Chinese press, also circulating in British India, that in return for a Russian pledge to protect China and to come to its assistance if the Chinese government could not quell domestic disturbances, China had handed over Tibet to Russia, or at least had agreed to exclusive Russian mining and railway concessions. The rumours were strong enough for London to issue a warning to Beijing that Great Britain 'would regard any alteration of the political Status quo in Tibet most seriously'.[22]

St Petersburg did its best to assure Great Britain that there was nothing to worry about. In July 1901 it had already communicated to London that the visits by Dorjiev could 'not be regarded as having any political or diplomatic character'.[23] They were religious visits aimed at meeting Buddhists living in Russia. Later, in April 1903, Lansdowne informed the British envoy in St Petersburg that the Russian ambassador in London had 're-assured him that there was no convention about Tibet' and that the Russian government had no 'intention of sending Agents or missions' into Tibet.[24] For British politicians and members of the public it was difficult to believe such words, suspicious as the British were of Russian intent, and convinced as they were that though one Russian government official might say one thing, another one or another state department might well act to the contrary of such words. And indeed, a Tibetan protectorate may well have been one of the desiderata of Nicholas II and a radical faction in the military, while in

21 Brodrick in House of Commons 13-4-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1904/apr/13/east-indian revenues-tibet).

22 Satow to Lansdowne 8-9-1902, *China Times 18-7-1902* (PRO FO 539 81).

23 Lamsdorff to Scott cited by Lord Reay in House of Lords 26-2-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/feb/26/the-mission-to-tibet).

24 Lansdowne to Scott 8-4-1903 cited by Lord Reay in House of Lords 26-2-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/feb/26/the-mission-to-tibet).

the press appeals to pester the British wherever possible, be it in Tibet or Afghanistan, continued to be voiced (Soroka 2011: 63). Even if the assurances were sincere it did not matter. In an effort to defend the invasion, the new Under-Secretary of State for India, the Earl of Hardwicke, gave the impression that psychological spheres of influence were as important as material ones. It was unimportant whether the Tibetan delegations to Russia had been of a commercial, political or religious nature. What mattered was that among Tibetans the impression had been created that they had the support of Russia and had 'said openly – "we do not fear England; we have Russia behind us"'.[25]

How far to enter into Tibet

Curzon, who was sure, or at least gave the impression of being sure, that Russia and Tibet had come to some sort of arrangement, was the driving force behind the expedition. Some even suspected that it was his personal revenge for the French occupation of Chantaboon in Thailand in 1893.[26] His opinions differed in two ways from that of the government at home. Curzon wanted to march on Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. London – which, according to Landon (1905 I: 36), was still 'far from understanding the urgency of the matter' when the invasion plans were developed in early 1903 – wanted to keep the intrusion into Tibetan territory as limited as possible, and instructed Curzon to retreat once negotiations had been concluded successfully. Curzon also pleaded for a British Resident in Lhasa or, if that was impossible, a British Agent in the city of Gyantse in the Nyang Chu Valley. London was forced to consider Russia, which viewed the expedition as an attempt to establish a British protectorate and was threatening to seek compensation elsewhere in Asia (Soroka 2011: 62-3, 69). Hamilton could agree with negotiations, also about trade, but not with a British Agent or Resident, which – and Afghanistan had shown what the implications might be – 'might entail difficulties and responsibilities incommensurate'.[27] Step by step, Curzon would get his way. He convinced London that the obstinate Tibetans, who continued to ignore the British eagerness to negotiate, should

25 Hardwicke in House of Lords 26-2-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/feb/26/the-mission-to-tibet).

26 Gibson Bowles in House of Commons 1-6-1904 (hansard.millbanksystem.com/commons/1904/jun/01/the-anglo-french-convention-bill).

27 Hamilton to Curzon 28-5-1903 cited by Lord Reay in House of Lords 26-2-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/feb/26/the-mission-to-tibet).

be made aware of the might of the British army, and therefore a further advance of the expedition was in order. As he impressed on London when the expedition was already underway: 'His Majesty's Government should realise that the Lhasa Government have no conception of our power'.[28]

On 27 February 1903 Hamilton informed Curzon that his 'proposal to send an armed mission to enter Lhasa, by force if necessary, and to establish there a Resident' might be the correct response were it only a matter of India and Tibet, but that the changed relations of China with the powers also had to be taken into account; and that London did not look forward to 'sanctioning a course which might be regarded as an attack on the integrity of the Chinese Empire'.[29] Persisting in his view that stationing a British Resident in Lhasa was 'the best possible security for future observance of conditions', Curzon proposed a compromise in the form of a trade market and a British Agent in the city of Gyantse.[30]

In April London made up its mind and opted for Khambajong, just across the border with Sikkim, as the place for the negotiations. The expedition should not move further into Tibet without consulting the home government. Khambajong was as far as the mission was allowed to advance. On 6 July 1903 the expedition, headed by Younghusband, now a Lieutenant Colonel who was given the title of British Commissioner for Thibet Frontier Matters, crossed the border; setting up camp in Khambajong the following day.[31] In fact, Indians had already secretly surveyed the countryside in advance. Younghusband waited in vain in Khambajong for months for any Tibetan representative to appear; and, for that matter, for the representative of the Chinese government, the Amban, the Chinese Governor of Tibet. But the Tibetans were doing their best to prevent the latter from joining negotiations. Growing impatient, Younghusband suggested occupying the Chumbi Valley bordering Sikkim and pushing on to Gyantse, about halfway along the road to Lhasa. Curzon informed London that such an advance would probably not be enough for Lhasa to enter into negotiations and that, almost certainly, the mission would have to penetrate deeper into Tibetan

28 Curzon to Hamilton 16-9-1903 cited by Lord Reay in House of Lords 26-2-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/feb/26/the-mission-to-tibet).

29 Hamilton to Curzon 27-2-1903 cited by Lord Reay in House of Lords 26-2-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/feb/26/the-mission-to-tibet).

30 Curzon to Hamilton 7-5-1903 cited by Lord Reay in House of Lords 26-2-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/feb/26/the-mission-to-tibet).

31 During the whole period of the expedition Curzon was on leave in Great Britain, his place as Viceroy taken by Oliver Russell, 2nd Baron Ampthill.

territory.[32] Agreeing to the occupation of the Chumbi Valley (where the expedition was to arrive on 16 December), Hamilton wired to Curzon that the British government had 'grave misgivings' about going beyond that point.[33] By the end of September Hamilton began to waver. On 1 October, a little more than a week before he would step down, he informed Curzon that London could consider proceeding to Gyantse 'if complete rupture of negotiations proves inevitable'.[34] On 5 November Curzon asked permission 'to transfer the scene of our negotiations to a locality in Tibet more suited for the purpose than Khambajong and better calculated to impress the Tibetan Government with a sense of our greatness and power'.[35] The following day Brodrick, who had succeeded Hamilton on 9 October, sanctioned an advance to Gyantse. London later claimed that the decision was taken after the Tibetans had resorted to acts of hostility.[36]

On 31 March 1904, on its way to Gyantse, the expeditionary force clashed with Tibetan soldiers at Guru. What happened added to the opposition to the expedition at home. The poorly armed Tibetans troops were no match for the British soldiers, who, Brodrick told the House of Commons, had acted 'under great provocation'.[37] Brodrick lamented the loss of life. Others, both those against and those in favour of the expedition, spoke about 'a very great and unfortunate slaughter'; 'the slaughter of 600 to 700 practically unarmed men by disciplined soldiers armed with the most modern weapons of precision'; and the 'heavy slaughter of … people … not only ignorant of civilisation, but absolutely ignorant of the horrors and dangers of warfare'.[38] Those who had been present thought differently. Landon (1905 I: 154) praised the discipline of the 'native troops' involved, noting that 'when the word was given they naturally had no mercy upon an enemy whose attempt to

32 Curzon to Hamilton 16-9-1903 cited by Lord Reay in House of Lords 26-2-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/feb/26/the-mission-to-tibet).

33 Hamilton to Curzon 20-9-1903 cited by Lord Reay in House of Lords 26-2-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/feb/26/the-mission-to-tibet).

34 Hamilton to Curzon 1-10-1903 cited by Lord Reay in House of Lords 26-2-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/feb/26/the-mission-to-tibet).

35 Curzon to Brodrick 5-11-1903 cited by Earl of Northbrook in House of Lords 19-4-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/apr/19/tibet-east-indian revenues).

36 Brodrick in House of Commons 12-5-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1904/may/12/tibet-mission-advance-to-lhasa).

37 Brodrick in House of Commons 13-4-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1904/apr/13/east-indian revenues-tibet).

38 Lough in House of Commons 13-4-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1904/apr/13/east-indian revenues-tibet), Earl of Spencer in House of Lords 19-4-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/apr/19/tibet-east-indian revenues).

Figure 25 Negotiations between Younghusband and the Commander of the Tibetan army just before the battle at Guru

Source: Landon 1905

equalise matters by the hand-to-hand use of vastly superior numbers had been tried and failed'.

The incident forced the Balfour cabinet to abandon the pretext that the mission was a peaceful one and to secure the approval of Parliament for military operations in Tibet (still paid for by India). As the Earl of Hardwicke would state in the House of Lords, Great Britain was 'no longer in Tibet on a peaceful Mission'.[39] The country was at war with Tibet.

On 12 April 1904 the British expedition reached Gyantse. Again, no Tibetan envoys made their appearance. On 12 May 1904, one week after the British position in Gyantse, where a fortress guarded the road to Lhasa, had come under attack (for which Dorjiev was blamed), Brodrick announced in Parliament that it had become imperative for the mission to march on to Lhasa unless representatives of the Tibetan government arrived in Gyantse within six weeks. A letter informing the Tibetan government was returned unopened. Some two weeks after the ultimatum had expired the British

39 Hardwicke in House of Lords 17-5-1904 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1904/may/17/tibet).

expedition marched to Lhasa. It reached the city in early August, only to withdraw again in late September. They returned to India with an Anglo-Tibetan Convention signed on 7 September in their hands.

The Anglo-Tibetan Convention

In London the Secretary of State for India could not agree with the text of the Anglo-Tibetan Convention, all the more because Russia had protested. Younghusband had brought Great Britain new territory in Tibet. He had enforced upon Lhasa an indemnity, to be paid off in seventy-five annual instalments, giving Great Britain the right to hold the Chumbi Valley as a security until the total sum had been paid. London – having promised Russia it would not annex any Tibetan territory – 'as an act of grace', as it was to be stated in the modified convention ratified by the Indian government in November, reduced the indemnity to one-third, and promised to return the Chumbi Valley to Tibet after three annual instalments had been paid. Younghusband was aghast. To him, the Chumbi Valley was 'the key to Tibet', the 'most difficult part of the road to Lhasa'. Possession of the Valley would give Great Britain 'a clear run into Tibet'.[40] Other critics also did not understand London's 'deference to the susceptibilities of Russia' (Landon 1905 II: 397).

In the Anglo-Tibetan Convention Tibet pledged that no portion of its territory would 'be ceded, sold, leased, mortgaged or otherwise given for occupation, to any foreign Power', and that it would not grant to foreigners 'concessions for railways, roads, telegraphs, mining or other rights'. In accordance with the British intention to block any political influence of Russia in Tibet Lhasa also agreed that no foreign power would be 'permitted to intervene in Thibetan affairs', and that no representatives of such a power would be allowed to enter the country.[41] In London *The Times* was pleased with the result. Relations with Tibet were better than ever and the treaty had 'added to the security of our North-Eastern frontier and strengthened our position throughout Central Asia' (Landon 1905 II: 401-2).

Before the British troops had entered Lhasa the Dalai Lama had fled to Outer Mongolia. In September, when the mission was still in the city, the

40 Younghusband cited by Campbell-Bannerman in House of Commons 14-2-1905 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1905/feb/14/kings-speech-motion-for-an-address).

41 Convention between Great Britain and Thibet 1904, Art.9 (www.tibetjustice.org/materials/treaties/treaties10.html, accessed 3-8-2010).

Chinese governor of Tibet formally deposed him. It mattered a great deal to the British that China would not allow him to return to Tibet. They feared the influence of the Dalai Lama among the population, afraid, as Satow phrased it, that 'the return of that sacred functionary to Lhasa would be the signal for the punishment of all Tibetans who have been friendly to us'.[42]

The Lhasa Convention gave Great Britain two markets, one in Gyantse and one in Gartok (a third one, in Yatung, almost immediately disappeared from the British desiderata); but, as the convention made clear, no British Resident in Lhasa, as Curzon (and also Younghusband) had wanted. London was against a formal British representation in Lhasa not only in view of the complications in Tibet that might be the result, but also because it had promised Russia that it would not appoint such an official (Landon 1905 II: 20). A legation would only be opened in 1937. In Gyantse a British trade agent, the former secretary and interpreter to the mission, was stationed. He could count on a military escort of Indian soldiers. In Gartok, according to one author 'probably the most remote outpost of the British Empire' (McKay 1997: 159), an Indian provincial officer became trade agent. He had to do without an escort.

Because Great Britain still recognised Chinese suzerainty over Tibet, the modified treaty was formalised in the Convention between Great Britain and China respecting Tibet, signed in Beijing on 27 April 1906. In one of its articles, China promised 'not to permit any other foreign State to interfere with the territory or internal administration of Tibet'. With respect to the concessions not allowed to be granted to foreigners in the Lhasa convention of 1904, an exception was made for telegraph lines connecting the two markets agreed upon in Tibet with India.[43] As early as late 1904, within a month of the Younghusband expedition, the British government would consider it better that Tibet remain in a 'state of isolation'.[44] When a new trade agreement, amending the one of 1893, was signed in Calcutta on 20 April 1908 (this time Tibet was a treaty partner),[45] it was done at a time when there seemed to be a widely shared feeling in Great Britain that the less the country had to do with Tibet the better. Just before the signing of the agreement Chumbi had been evacuated in February 1908.

42 Satow to Grey 22-1-1906 (PRO FO 800 44).

43 Convention between Great Britain and China respecting Tibet 1906, Art. 2, 3. (www.tibetjustice.org/materials/treaties/treaties11.html, accessed 3-8-2010).

44 Morley in House of Commons 5-7-1906 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1906/jul/5/tibet).

45 Agreement between Great Britain, China and Tibet Amending Trade Regulations of 1893 (www.tibetjustice.org/materials/treaties/treaties13.html, accessed 3-8-2010).

The following year Beijing ordered the army to enter Tibet to assert China's suzerainty and to prevent other nations from taking advantage of regional unrest in China's frontier provinces. British intervention was also not precluded. A situation might develop that could make Great Britain decide to send a military expedition into Tibet to act upon unruly Tibetans stirring up trouble against the British; a possibility that not so long before had been hinted at by British Members of Parliament speculating about China losing control over Tibet.[46] The Dalai Lama (reinstated in November 1908) fled to British India. For Russia, the establishment of real Chinese authority in Tibet was a positive development. Since the Younghusband expedition, St Petersburg had urged Beijing to establish its authority there in order to forestall any chance of a growing British influence in Tibet (Soroka 1911: 6). For the British it was a moment of concern. At stake was Chinese interference in Bhutan, in between India and Tibet and considered by China to be its vassal. Great Britain reacted by putting the kingdom under a formal protectorate in the Treaty of Punakha of 8 January 1910.

In concluding its treaties, Great Britain had acknowledged China's suzerainty over Tibet. In July 1914, two years after the Chinese Republic had been founded, this had changed when the secret, to this day much disputed, Anglo-Tibetan Declaration was signed at Simla. China was no partner to it, its representative having withdrawn in protest from the negotiations. Appended to the Simla Accord was the treaty that China had refused to sign. In it China's suzerainty over Tibet was acknowledged but it was also stated that Great Britain and China recognised the autonomy of what was called 'Outer Tibet' and that in view of 'the special interest of Great Britain' and of 'the maintenance of peace and order in the neighbourhood of the frontiers of India', China promised 'not to send troops to Outer Tibet, nor to station civil or military officers, nor to establish Chinese colonies in the country'. Great Britain and Tibet also agreed on their frontier, the so-called McMahon Line. China never recognised it, claiming part of the Indian frontier region as Tibetan and thus Chinese territory.[47]

46 Earl of Ronaldshay and Balfour in House of Commons 17-2-1908 (hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1908/feb/17/the-anglo-russion-convention).

47 Convention between Great Britain, China and Tibet, Simla (1914), attached to the Anglo-Tibetan Declaration of 3 July 1914, Art.2, 3 (www.tibetjustice.org/materials/treaties/treaties16.html, accessed 3-8-2010).