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**SCIENCE AND SPIES ON THE SINO-TIBETAN FRONTIER,  
1913-1922**

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### Abstract

This dissertation examines the presence of three British consular officers in the border regions of western China and eastern Tibet during the politically volatile and precarious decade following the 1911 Chinese Republican revolution. Situating their activities in the broader context of the so-called ‘Great Game’ era, this study looks in particular at the relationship between the political and military intelligence gathering and scientific exploration activities which were pursued by these three officials. The dissertation argues that ‘knowledge gathering’ was central to the *process* of empire and that peripheral *borderland* regions were of key importance to the metropole centre of the British imperialist project. The subsequent dissemination of such intelligence obtained in borderland regions blurred the lines between the scientific and political, the private and public, and thereby served manifold ends in which individual players were key elements in creating and directing imperial agency.

*Keywords:* Imperialism, frontiers, borderlands, knowledge gathering, science, empire, diplomacy, intelligence, China, Tibet, India, Britain, Russia, The Great Game

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## **Abbreviations**

NA – The National Archives, Kew, London

BL – The British Library, London

SOAS – The School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London

RGS – The Royal Geographical Society, London

## **Romanisation**

On the whole I have favoured the modern *Pinyin* system for Chinese names of places and persons, except where the *Wade-Giles* versions seem to be more readily familiar or well-known and therefore more contextually appropriate.

## Introduction – Secret Instructions

‘Secret. Peking, September 4<sup>th</sup> 1913.

Sir, I have to instruct you to proceed to Szechuen forthwith for duty as Intelligence officer on the Tibetan frontier in connection with the forthcoming conference to be held at Simla.

You will proceed via Chengtu and your official position vis-à-vis the Chinese Auths. will be that of Assistant attached to H.M. Consulate General there.

You will use your best endeavours to proceed as far west as possible and to make your headquarters at Tachienlu or as near thereto as the Chinese officials will allow and your principal duty will be to obtain information regarding the movements of Chinese troops in the March region.

[...]

You will bear in mind that the object of your journeys will be best advanced by avoiding any friction with the Ch. Auths. and generally the success or failure of your mission may be said to depend on the exercise by you of the greatest tact and discretion.’<sup>1</sup>

These secret instructions were given to Louis Magrath King, a junior member of the British Consular Service in China, by Sir Beilby Alston, the Minister in charge of the British Legation at Peking (Beijing). Louis King was the first of three British consular officials sent

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<sup>1</sup> National Archives (NA), FO 228/2582, Alston to King, 4 September 1913

to gather intelligence on the Sino-Tibetan frontier between 1913 and 1922. These instructions effectively placed King at the nexus of three competing Imperial powers – at the easternmost edge of what was then popularly referred to as ‘the Great Game.’

The Great Game was essentially a term used to refer to the rivalry between the Russian and British Empires as it was played out in the regions of Central Asia. The British Government of India were concerned and ever vigilant against the threat of Russian influence encroaching from the north. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries India was certainly the most important territorial possession in the British Empire and therefore worth safeguarding at all costs. In relation to the defence of this large domain and its lengthy seaboard, the British could rest relatively assured in the protection offered by the British Navy’s global pre-eminence; yet the land borders of India’s northern frontier were another matter altogether.<sup>2</sup> The mountains of the Himalaya, which stretch across this northern region, presented a distinct geographical border which afforded British India a degree of protection in terms of the physical difficulties that its terrain would pose to any invading force coming down from the north; but, as a natural barrier, it similarly worked both ways. From the southern perspective, looking apprehensively north, that same impenetrability also meant that the British-Indian Government was itself only able to obtain a limited amount of intelligence on what was happening beyond the hill country and the high mountains of the Himalaya – particularly in the regions of Afghanistan and Tibet. Consequently the British-Indian Government’s preoccupation with intelligence gathering efforts in the latter decades of the nineteenth century and on into the early twentieth century arguably verged on outright

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<sup>2</sup> John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 258 & 264-265; David Fromkin, ‘The Great Game in Asia’ in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (Spring, 1980), pp. 939-940 & 944-945

paranoia.<sup>3</sup> The British Authorities in India went to great pains in this particular regard. In the 1870s they trained and dispatched an indigenous network of spies, known as ‘Pundits’ – famously fictionalised in Rudyard Kipling’s 1911 novel, *Kim* – to map and gather information in these Central Asian regions.<sup>4</sup> The idea of recruiting and training these Pundit spies was proposed by Captain Thomas Montgomerie of the Royal Engineers. His reasoning was both remarkably pragmatic and politically astute, as Peter Hopkirk summarises:

‘They [the Pundits] were far less likely to be detected than a European, however good the latter’s disguise. If they were unfortunate enough to be discovered, moreover, it would be less politically embarrassing to the authorities than if a British officer was caught red-handed making maps in these highly sensitive and dangerous parts.’<sup>5</sup>

Montgomerie was serving as an officer attached to the ‘Trigonometrical Survey of India’ at the time and when the initiative was approved he personally took on the training of these men, all carefully selected from hill tribes, in the foothills of the Himalaya at Dehradun. The covert methods and techniques which Montgomerie devised for conducting the basic rudiments of land surveying were ingenious. For the most part the men would travel incognito by posing as Buddhist pilgrims, and, as such, they were taught a number of techniques which would be compatible with this disguise – for example, they practiced how to take a fixed stride of measured length, as well as how to maintain this stride at a constant pace regardless of the type of terrain, whether walking uphill, downhill, or on a level plain.

Each Pundit was issued with a rosary of beads, as were commonly carried by all such

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<sup>3</sup> See, Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: On Secret Service in High Asia* (London: John Murray, 2006); R. A. Johnson, “‘Russians at the Gates of India’? Planning the Defence of India, 1885-1900’ in *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 67, No. 3 (July, 2003), pp. 697-743

<sup>4</sup> Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); see also, Derek Waller, *The Pundits: British Exploration of Tibet and Central Asia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990); Michael Ward, ‘The Survey of India and the Pundits: The Secret Exploration of the Himalaya and Central Asia’ in *Alpine Journal* 103 (1998), pp. 59-79

<sup>5</sup> Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, pp. 329-332

pilgrims. These rosaries normally consisted of 108 beads, however, those issued by Montgomerie were made up with eight beads less – thus the Pundits were able to carry a mechanism which was in essence mathematically calibrated for better measuring the distances they covered in a day’s march, without being noticeable enough to attract suspicion. ‘Log books’ for recording distances and other measurements, as well as topographical observations, etc., were concealed in the cylinders of prayer wheels which were also part of the standard paraphernalia that Buddhist pilgrims in these regions typically carried. The cylinders of these devices were usually filled with tightly rolled up scrolls of paper upon which would be written prayers and *sutras* – religious texts in minute script. When spun, the action of revolving the prayer wheel was thought to invoke the efficacy of all the sacred scriptures contained within the copper cylinder. Naturally enough, the Pundits were issued with prayer wheels which contained blank scrolls upon which they could discreetly write down the details of their daily log. In this way the Pundits were able to gather a vast amount of geographical data which was then passed back to the Survey of India where it was processed into usable ‘intelligence’ – the maps and reports that provided the British authorities with a reliable picture of the territory immediately beyond their vulnerable northern imperial boundary.<sup>6</sup>

In recent years scholars across a wide range of academic disciplines have turned their attention to the ‘process of empire.’ Historians in particular have begun to focus on imperial systems – analysing, as David Ludden enumerates: ‘vast collections of activities, decisions, assumptions and routines, and spatially and temporally shifting aggregations of ideas and motives among individuals who generate imperial forms of power and authority in everyday

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<sup>6</sup> Hopkirk, *The Great Game*, pp. 330-331; Ward, ‘The Survey of India and the Pundits’, pp. 60-61

life, adapting them to changing circumstances'<sup>7</sup> – as these *processes* are the means by which imperial agency effectively operated. Indeed, the historian, David Armitage has observed that empire is essentially 'a language of power.'<sup>8</sup> In this sense the twin themes of knowledge and empire have come to the forefront of such enquiries. The Survey of India is a clear example of this type of 'knowledge gathering' system intentionally created as an institution to facilitate imperial agency. The Survey's primary focus was the collection of geographical data – this information was scientifically collected, processed, and then used with the express purpose of imposing and administering a stable system of imperial rule. The Survey was actually a military body charged with providing the Government of India with reliable maps of the entire sub-continent and its surrounding regions. Accurately surveying such a vast area was no mean feat, and the results of such a task – simultaneously noting the differences of local climates, economies, geology and topographies, population densities and demographics, etc. – undoubtedly improved the smooth and efficient running of such a vast domain of widely differing regions and diverse ethnicities, and thereby helped the central political and military hubs of the colonial authorities to maintain and utilise their power over the subject population.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, as we have already seen, the safeguarding of such predominantly inward looking systems of power within the territory could not be allowed to neglect the watchful supervision of the frontiers of the empire. Hence the recent rise of another *transdisciplinary* area of academic enquiry – that of 'borderland studies.'<sup>10</sup> This too is very much perceived as an examination of *process*, one which superficially concerns itself with the relationship

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<sup>7</sup> David Ludden, 'The Process of Empire: Frontiers and Borderlands' in Peter Fibiger Bang and C. A. Bayly (eds.), *Tributary Empires in Global History* (London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 134

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Ludden, 'The Process of Empire', p. 133

<sup>9</sup> See, David Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 242-244

<sup>10</sup> The most recent and comprehensive example of this type of study for the Central Asian region is: Alfred J. Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands: From the Rise of Early Modern Empires to the End of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014)

between the centre and the periphery of empire; but which in practice also concerns itself with much deeper, and sometimes less readily traceable, strands of local patterns and interests, as well as the heightened prominence and personal agency of certain individual players – the likes of whom, located closer to the centres of such empires, might otherwise have had less significance and so remained relatively obscure presences, absorbed within the greater general collective of imperial administrators. As Ludden again describes:

‘[I]mperial histories mingle in borderlands, where spatial and temporal frontiers overlap. Military, political, institutional, cultural, linguistic, ethnic, social and economic frontiers move spatially and temporally at their own pace, so that empire cannot be contained within definite parameters. In elite views from the apex of empire, each regime has its own place in space and time; but on the margins, empire typically includes contending, intermingled imperial histories, encoded in various languages.

Thus in borderlands, ‘the language of power’ can be multiple, creolised and available only in translation or indirectly; archives are typically polyglot, dispersed, obscure and contradictory.’<sup>11</sup>

The key words for this historical enquiry then are contained in the British Minister’s own secret instructions to Louis King – they are: ‘intelligence’ and ‘frontier.’<sup>12</sup> The twin themes of this dissertation will be ‘knowledge gathering’ and ‘empire’ specifically located in that liminal zone of the ‘imperial frontier’ – in this case, the Sino-Tibetan frontier during the first few decades of the twentieth century. Like the Pundits in India, consular officials in China,

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<sup>11</sup> Ludden, ‘The Process of Empire’, p. 136

<sup>12</sup> The same instructions (almost word-for-word) were issued to Oliver Coales, who relieved Louis King at Tachienlu in 1916, by Sir John Jordan who had succeeded Sir Beilby Alston as British Minister at Peking; see, British Library (BL), L/P&S/11/81, Jordan to Coales, 3 November 1915

such as Louis King, Oliver Coales, and (later Sir) Eric Teichman, who will be the main focus of this study, acted as instruments of Western imperialism. They too scientifically mapped and compiled sensitive political reports in a peripheral zone which was deemed of great importance to the imperial hub; yet, unlike the Pundits – as privileged Europeans – they were allowed a greater degree of individual prominence, recognition, and agency. In a sense, as career-minded imperialists, their activities shaped their own lives and personal concerns as much as they shaped the institutional concerns of empire.<sup>13</sup> And yet, at the same time, whilst examining the *micro-macro* role of these three particular individuals, fixing this enquiry in the broader historical context of the Great Game, which was of primary and clearly defined concern to the colonial government of British-India, as well as the less clearly defined interests and concerns of the British diplomatic (or ‘informal’ imperial) presence in China – it is hoped – will allow a wider comparative view of the complex and overlapping spatial and temporal processes of empire to emerge.<sup>14</sup> The mutual rivalries of three imperial powers on what was politically deeply contested ground were the impetus for these three individuals presence on the Sino-Tibetan frontier, but the scientific information which they each amassed was later communicated by each of them in both private and public forums arguably for distinctly differing ends. These various ‘communications’ are the primary sources which will be examined here – namely the Foreign Office papers held at the National Archives in Kew, and the India Office archives now held at the British Library, with supplementary material from the Special Collections at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, the archives of the Royal Geographical Society, and the family papers of Louis

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<sup>13</sup> See, Alex McKay, *Tibet and the Raj: The Frontier Cadre, 1904-1947* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 2009), Chapter 13

<sup>14</sup> See, Jurgen Osterhammel, ‘Semi-Colonialism and Informal Empire in Twentieth-Century China: Towards A Framework for Analysis’ in Wolfgang J. Mommsen & Jurgen Osterhammel (eds.), *Imperialism and After: Continuities and Discontinuities* (London: German Historical Institute, 1986); Ian Phimister, ‘Finance and Informal Empire: Britain and China, c.1900-1912’ in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (July, 2006), pp. 737-759

Magrath King (private); as well as various books and journal articles which each of the three men authored and published (public).

## Chapter One – The Lie of the Land

Louis Magrath King was not the first representative of an imperial power instructed to set up an outpost on the Sino-Tibetan border at Tachienlu. In September 1903, exactly a decade before, he was preceded by Russian officials, who maintained a consulate of sorts there for just over a year's duration. Ostensibly “for maintaining direct and regular intercourse between the [Russian] Imperial Government and the supreme Buddhist authorities of Tibet.” [...] The consulate was basically used by the Russians as a listening post to monitor the British and French activities in the south-eastern part of Asia.’<sup>15</sup>

Tachienlu – thought to be a corrupted Chinese transliteration of the Tibetan, Dartsendo (now more commonly known in Chinese as Kangding) – was an important trading town. Located at the far western edge of China in the mountains on the road leading up from the Chinese lowland plain to the high Tibetan plateau, Tachienlu was known as the starting point of the ‘Tea Road’ – part of the ancient network of trading routes that made up the wonderfully named ‘Silk Road’, which spanned the continent of Asia, linking the Mediterranean to the heart of the Chinese Empire.<sup>16</sup> Back-breaking loads of brick tea were carried up to Tachienlu from all over Sichuan by Chinese porters (as much as 350lbs / 159kgs per porter), where the tea was then traded with the Tibetans for other commodities, such as musk, furs, wool, and Tibetan medicines, which the Chinese home market desired and valued

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<sup>15</sup> Alexandre Andreyev, ‘The Tsar’s Generals and Tibet. Apropos of some ‘white spots’ in the history of Russo-Tibetan relations’ in Alex McKay (ed.), *Tibet and Her Neighbours: A History* (London: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 2003), p. 168

<sup>16</sup> The phrase was first coined by the geologist and geographer, Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen in 1877; see, Daniel C. Waugh, ‘Richthofen’s “Silk Roads”: Toward the Archaeology of a Concept’ in *The Silk Road* Vol. 5, No.1 (Summer, 2007), pp. 1-10

most.<sup>17</sup> From Tachienlu the brick tea parcels, carefully wrapped in animal skins for protection from the elements, were strapped to the backs of lumbering yaks, which then set out in great caravans on the slow and difficult three and a half month journey to the Tibetan capital, Lhasa.<sup>18</sup> Such trade routes were always of interest to Western consuls and Customs officials residing in China, part of whose official duties were to file local trade reports which were filtered back to the Foreign Office in London.<sup>19</sup> However, even into the early years of the twentieth century, Tibet had always been a territory which historically was largely out of bounds to westerners.

The British colonial presence in the sub-continent had been established by the British East India Company in 1757.<sup>20</sup> The first diplomatic contact between Britain and Tibet was made in 1774 when Warren Hastings, the Governor-General of the East India Company residing in Bengal, entered into correspondence with the ‘Tashi’ or ‘Teshoo Lama’ as he was at first known – this was the sixth Panchen Lama, Losang Palden Yeshe, whose seat traditionally resides at Tashilhunpo, near Shigatse in Western Tibet. The Panchen Lama is the second highest ranking religious authority under the Dalai Lama, who since 1642 has traditionally presided as the head of the ruling elite of the Tibetan Government.<sup>21</sup> Hastings was markedly impressed by the gifts which accompanied the Panchen Lama’s letter, which

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<sup>17</sup> For a photograph of a Chinese porter carrying one of these enormous loads: see, Louis Magrath King, *China in Turmoil: Studies in Personality* (London: Heath Cranton, 1927), plate opposite p. 124

<sup>18</sup> See, A. de Rosthorn, *On the Tea Cultivation in Western Ssuch’uan and the Tea Trade with Tibet via Tachienlu* (London: Cuzac & Co., 1895); &, J. H. Edgar, ‘Notes on Trade Routes Converging at Tatsienlu’ in *Journal of the West China Border Research Society*, Vol. 4, 1930-1931, pp. 5-8. Official couriers could cover this distance in a much shorter period, possibly even as little as fifteen days at the peak of its operation, see, J. H. Edgar, ‘The Old Courier service between Tachienlu and Lhasa’ in *Journal of the West China Border Research Society*, Vol. 4, 1930-1931, pp. 9-13

<sup>19</sup> Whilst the Chinese Maritime Customs Service was answerable to the Chinese Government it was essentially run and controlled by the Western imperial powers, most notably Britain; see, Donna Brunero, *Britain’s Imperial Cornerstone in China: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1949* (London: Routledge, 2004); Chihyun Chang, *Government, Imperialism and Nationalism in China: The Maritime Customs Service and its Chinese Staff* (London: Routledge, 2012); &, Hans van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past: The Maritime Customs Service and the Global Origins of Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014)

<sup>20</sup> See, John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 25

<sup>21</sup> For the rise to power of the Dalai Lamas, see: Sam van Schaik, *Tibet: A History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), Chapter 6, especially pp. 123-129

included ‘sheets of gilt leather stamped with the Russian eagle, bags of musk and gold dust, Tibetan woollen cloth and Chinese silk.’<sup>22</sup> As head of the Company, arguably the ‘first multinational’, Hastings saw the goods and the eloquent letter as indications that the Tibetans were a wealthy and civilised people with extensive trade connections – the unexpected arrival of which opened up the tantalising prospect of new opportunities for trade. It was possibly the Chinese silks which caught his interest the most, because at this time the British were striving to find ways to open up their trade relations with China, which, in accord with an edict given by the Qianlong Emperor in 1757, had remained stiflingly confined to the port of Canton (Guangzhou) which was only open for a limited number of months each year.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps Tibet would provide the Company with another route into China? Perhaps even the Panchen Lama might be willing to act on their behalf and offer some diplomatic leverage as a ‘go-between’ with the Chinese Emperor?

It was worth a try, and so Hastings wasted little time. He despatched his personal secretary, George Bogle, as head of a diplomatic mission to visit the Panchen Lama at Tashilhunpo, charged with the task of establishing a trade agreement with the Tibetans. On reaching the northern frontier Bogle’s mission was initially denied access to Tibet when the regent ruling in Lhasa during the minority of the eighth Dalai Lama heard of the proposed meeting – stating that: ‘Tibet was subject to the Chinese Emperor, who had forbidden entry to any Indians, Afghans or Europeans,’<sup>24</sup> but, despite this, and to his great relief, Bogle’s Tibetan and Indian aides managed to persuade the Panchen Lama to receive him. Bogle was surprised to find that the Lama was a remarkably informal and even affable man whom he could converse with directly in Hindi without the aid of a translator.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Van Schaik, *Tibet*, p. 146

<sup>23</sup> William T. Rowe, *China’s Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Cambridge, MA., & London: Belknap, 2009), pp. 141-148

<sup>24</sup> Van Schaik, *Tibet*, p. 148

<sup>25</sup> Van Schaik, *Tibet*, p. 148

Bogle, who has since been described as ‘a product of the Scottish Enlightenment’, spent four months in Tibet during the winter and spring of 1774-1775.<sup>26</sup> He was an open-minded individual. Remarkably sympathetic to the Tibetans and their culture, he was curious and tolerant rather than being quick to judge or looking down upon them as either a backward or an inferior people – a fact which seems to shine through in all his many writings (his personal journal, private correspondence, as well as his official reports) on the mission which he lead.<sup>27</sup> The mission was undoubtedly an amicable success in terms of diplomacy, for the Panchen Lama did indeed favourably mention the British to the Qianlong Emperor on a subsequent visit the Lama made to the Chinese capital, Chengde. Qianlong apparently even agreed to open a correspondence with Hastings, promising to send his first missive to the Governor-General in the care of the Panchen Lama when the Lama returned to Tibet, yet sadly this was not to be. The Panchen Lama succumbed to smallpox during his stay in Chengde and passed away there, consequently he never returned to Tibet. Nor it seems did anything further come of Qianlong’s promise to enter into a correspondence with Warren Hastings in India, hence the lucrative trade relations which Hastings had hoped might develop as a result of Bogle’s mission were never fully realised.<sup>28</sup> In fact, from the 1790s onwards, Tibet was effectively sealed off from the outside world by a complex set of factors stemming from a conflict between Tibet and the Kingdom of Nepal, and a deliberate Tibetan policy of isolation prompted by the influence of Imperial China.<sup>29</sup> It would be 130 years before another British Mission was sent to Tibet, but this one would be a very different mission – different in motivation, with wholly different aims, different conduct, and very different results to the one which had been headed by George Bogle in 1774.

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<sup>26</sup> Alistair Lamb (ed.), *Bhutan and Tibet: The Travels of George Bogle and Alexander Hamilton, 1774-1777* (Hertingfordbury: Roxford Books, 2002), Vol. 1, p. 9

<sup>27</sup> John MacGregor, *Tibet: A Chronicle of Exploration* (New York & Washington: Praeger, 1970), Chapter 8

<sup>28</sup> Van Schaik, *Tibet*, pp. 150-155

<sup>29</sup> Van Schaik, *Tibet*, pp. 155-160

In many ways the mystique of ‘forbidden’ Tibet as it first arose in the collective European imagination can be traced to this period at the close of the eighteenth century. It would last for roughly a 150 years, and for some Europeans it would become an obsession. Even up into the early decades of the twentieth century there were many travellers originating from the West who variously laid claim to being the ‘first’ to penetrate the *Shangri-la* which Tibet had become in the Western *orientalist* imagination.<sup>30</sup> As we shall see, even the three consuls, whose journeys in eastern Tibet are examined in this dissertation, were at pains to stress the ‘firsts’ which they each achieved in traversing certain ‘unexplored’ valleys or crossing famous rivers at particular ‘hitherto uncharted’ reaches.<sup>31</sup> Whatever the relative qualifications which might be applied to tame or tone down these grandiose (and occasionally bombastic) claims – and, whilst Tibet was certainly adept at successfully turning back incoming outsiders – there were in fact a number of Europeans who preceded George Bogle, and certainly a few intrepid interlopers who came after him as well, such as the Pundits already mentioned, but none had quite as devastating an impact as the second official mission headed by Colonel Francis Younghusband in 1904.<sup>32</sup>

If George Bogle was the epitome of a peaceable emissary, embodying the very best ideals of the early modern Enlightenment era, an ambassador who came hoping to build a bridge between different peoples, as Gordon T. Stewart has shown in his comparative study *Journeys to Empire* (2009) – Francis Younghusband was perhaps equally the epitome of a later age, in which a new world order was being spearheaded by the markedly more

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<sup>30</sup> Credit for the term ‘Shangri-la’ entering into common parlance as a synonym for an ideal and unreachable, secluded paradise undoubtedly rests with James Hilton’s famous 1939 novel, *Lost Horizon*, which takes its inspiration from Tibet. See also, Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003); McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj*, pp. 230-232

<sup>31</sup> See, King, *China in Turmoil*, pp. 195-196; Louis Magrath King, *The Five Coloured Clouds* (MS. unfinished autobiography, unpublished, c.1947-1949), in which King states that he and Eric Teichman ‘broke new ground as travellers in the wilds.’

<sup>32</sup> See, MacGregor, *Tibet*, Chapter 17 & 18; and, Peter Hopkirk, *Trespassers on the Roof of the World* (London: John Murray, 2006), Chapter 10

aggressive and uncompromising ‘forward policies’ of late Western imperialism.<sup>33</sup>

Younghusband’s expedition was primarily a military one. As with Bogle’s mission, it had been officially despatched by the Viceroy who governed British-India. This was Lord Curzon of Kedleston – a self-proclaimed advocate of the Imperialist ethos. Curzon had been appointed Viceroy in 1898 at the age of thirty-eight, and despite suffering from an injured spine he was a tireless traveller, whose entire life was devoted to upholding British prestige and promoting British interests in Asia. His character was also defined by a distinct distrust of Russia. As one of Curzon’s biographers, Sir Harold Nicholson later observed, ‘most of Curzon’s basic convictions, the articles of his faith, were absorbed before he left Eton in 1878.’<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Curzon had been in attendance when the School’s Debating Society had met on 7 May 1877 to discuss the question: ‘Are we justified in regarding with equanimity the advance of Russia towards our Indian frontier?’ With the seeds of his Imperialist convictions sown so early and reinforced by what he saw whilst journeying from the shores of the Caspian Sea to Samarkand, through Russian Central Asia by way of their impressive network of newly laid railways, it is perhaps with little wonder that Peter Fleming has noted that Curzon’s ‘advocacy of a forward policy was persistent, sonorous and didactic.’<sup>35</sup> The ‘Russian threat’ was in some senses, his life’s main work.

As for the Russian perspective there was arguably a logical justification to their interests in expanding their empire to the south and east. During the nineteenth century they had witnessed the ‘Scramble for Africa’ in which the continent had been carved up by the other Western powers, why then should they not claim their own rightful portions of Asia? After all, it seemed natural enough given that most of these territories were sat right on

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<sup>33</sup> See, Gordon T. Stewart, *Journeys to Empire: Enlightenment, Imperialism, and the British Encounter with Tibet, 1774-1904* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in, Peter Fleming, *Bayonets to Lhasa: The British Invasion of Tibet* (London & New York: Tauris Parke, 2012), p. 6

<sup>35</sup> Fleming, *Bayonets to Lhasa*, p. 7

Russia's doorstep, so to speak.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, they set about their task with militaristic tenacity, as Fleming describes:

‘Throughout the nineteenth century Russia’s Asiatic policy had been canny, successful and (within a framework of opportunism) consistent. [...] One after another the crumbling Khanates were swallowed – Khiva, Bokhara, Khokand and the rest. The hill-tribes of the Caucasus were painfully subdued, and their ancestral valleys added to the Tsar’s more desirable holdings in Transcaucasia, where the petty kingdoms between the Black Sea and the Caspian had been forced to acknowledge Russian sovereignty.’<sup>37</sup>

In this atmosphere of mutual Imperial suspicion and rivalry a question mark came to hover uneasily over Tibet. Reports of Russian explorers – speculative merchants and opportunistic adventurers, as well as officially sanctioned scientific expeditions – occasionally (and often rather vaguely) filtered back to the British via their network of Pundits.<sup>38</sup> Even Sven Hedin, the famous Swedish explorer, came under suspicion – accused of having been secretly contracted by the Russians to survey known gold fields in Tibet, although it was never proved that Hedin was actually a Russian agent.<sup>39</sup> What alarmed Curzon most though were the rumours of direct diplomatic ties being established between Saint Petersburg and Lhasa, and moreso – the traffic of Russian arms into Tibet.

It was stories of the growing influence which a shadowy figure known as Agvan Dorjiev (or Agyan / Aguan Dorjjeff) was rumoured to have brokered by insinuating himself

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<sup>36</sup> See, Peter Waldron, ‘Przheval’skii, Asia and Empire’ in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 88, No. 1-2 (January-April, 2010), pp. 309-327

<sup>37</sup> Fleming, *Bayonets to Lhasa*, p. 1-2; see also, Johnson, “‘Russians at the Gates of India’? Planning the Defence of India, 1885-1900’

<sup>38</sup> See, Macgregor, *Tibet*, Chapters 15 & 16; Anonymous, ‘The Central Asian Expedition of Captain Roborovsky and Lieut. Kozloff’ in *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (August, 1896), pp. 161-173

<sup>39</sup> Macgregor, *Tibet*, pp. 304-305

into the courts of both the Russian Tsar and the Dalai Lama in Tibet which set a light to the touch-paper of Curzon's paranoia, and prompted him to commit an act of what John MacGregor has euphemistically called, 'grapeshot diplomacy.'<sup>40</sup>

Dorjiev was of Russian nationality, yet he was also by birth a Buriat (Buryat) Mongol – which meant, as was common with many native-born Mongolians, he was an adherent of 'Lamaism' or Tibetan Buddhism. This simple fact gave him a great advantage over Montgomerie's Hindu Pundits, who had to pretend to be Buddhist pilgrims; the reality of Dorjiev's religion was his best disguise, and as such, it was said that he was able to convince the Dalai Lama that the Russian Tsar was also a Buddhist – he even went so far as to claim that the Tsar was in fact the reincarnation of Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelugpa (Yellow Hat) sect, the denomination of Tibetan Buddhism over which the Dalai Lama himself presides. Fascinatingly this last piece of intelligence was reported by Ekai Kawaguchi, a Japanese spy residing in Lhasa, who was in frequent contact with the Pundit, Sarat Chandra Das.<sup>41</sup>

Until this point the British had been used to dealing with issues relating to Tibet through China – yet the status of Tibet in the collective British diplomatic mind had always been rather fuzzy. The Opium Wars of 1839-1842 and 1858-1860 succeeded in reversing the famous rebuff of the British Embassy to the Emperor Qianlong lead by Lord Macartney in 1792-1794, and as a result of this China was forced to open up a series of Treaty Ports in

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<sup>40</sup> MacGregor, *Tibet*, p. 299; a number of variant spellings of Dorjiev's name appear in the historical record, and one later suggestion by the Tibetologist, W.A. Unkring, is that the name may even be a corrupted variant of the Tibetan 'Nag-dhan Dorje,' meaning 'The Gifted Orator, Thunderbolt' – see footnote on p. 282; see also, John Snelling, 'Agvan Dorjiev: Eminence Grise of Central Asian Politics' in *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 21, Issue 1 (1990), pp. 36-43; Nikolai Kuleshov, 'Agvan Dorjiev, the Dalai Lama's Ambassador', in *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 23, Issue 1 (1992), pp. 20-33; Alexandre Andreyev, 'An Unknown Russian Memoir by Aagvan Dorjiev' in *Inner Asia*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2001), pp. 27-39

<sup>41</sup> MacGregor, *Tibet*, Chapters 15 & 16; & Van Schaik, *Tibet*, pp. 170-171; see also, Sarat Chandra Das, *A Journey to Lhasa and Central Tibet* (London: John Murray, 1902); Ekai Kawaguchi, *Three Years in Tibet* (Benares & London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1909); for more on Japanese imperialist interests in Tibet: see, Imre Galambos & Kitsudo Koichi, 'Japanese Exploration of Central Asia: The Otani Expeditions and their British Connections' in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 75, No. 1 (2012), pp. 113-134

which representatives of all the major Western Powers, as well as Japan, could reside and establish trade emporiums at key points along China's coast, whilst simultaneously reaching deep into China's vast interior through a network of riverine ports.<sup>42</sup> The close of the nineteenth century and the opening of the twentieth century saw the Chinese Empire increasingly transformed into a hybrid form of semi-colonialism – never fully colonised the weakened Chinese Empire was instead bullied and cajoled by the great Imperialist Powers of Germany, France, Russia, Japan, and the US, conspicuously lead by the British, into a crippling system of extraterritoriality.<sup>43</sup> This hundred year period is now commonly referred to by historians of modern China as a period of 'Informal Empire.'<sup>44</sup> In China itself it remains rather more politically charged – the State Education system has ensured that this hybrid post-colonial legacy lingers painfully in the collective memory, hence it is still bitterly remembered there as China's 'Century of National Humiliation.'<sup>45</sup> For contemporary Victorians, however, Western Imperialism was viewed as very much a global movement for moral as well as economic good.<sup>46</sup>

Nineteenth century notions of imperialism, particularly those upon which the British Empire operated, were very much founded in a belief in the ultimately benevolent aims of opening the world to a global system of 'free trade.'<sup>47</sup> Commerce was seen as the key to a new era of global civilisation, indeed, it was very much seen as part and parcel of a '*mission*

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<sup>42</sup> See, Julia Lovell, *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of Modern China* (London: Picador, 2011); Alain Peyrefitte, *The Collision of Two Civilisations: The British Expedition to China, 1792-1794* (London: Harvill, 1993); James Hevia, *Cherishing Men From Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1995); & John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964)

<sup>43</sup> See, Robert Bickers, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire, 1832-1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2011); and, Pär Kristoffer Cassel, *Grounds of Judgement: Extraterritoriality and Imperial Power in Nineteenth-Century China and Japan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)

<sup>44</sup> See, Osterhammel, 'Semi-Colonialism and Informal Empire in Twentieth-Century China'

<sup>45</sup> Zheng Wang, "Never Forget National Humiliation" in *The Newsletter (IIAS)*, No. 59 (Spring, 2012), pp. 32-33.

<sup>46</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 206-207

<sup>47</sup> See, John Gallagher & Ronald Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade' in *Economic History Review*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, Vol. VI, No. 1 (1953), pp. 1-15

*civilisatrice*.<sup>48</sup> It had grown out of the writings of Enlightenment thinkers, such as Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (published in 1776), and as such, as John Darwin explains:

‘Free commercial relations would allow the free passage of ideas. It was easy to think that complementary economies would become complementary cultures as well, and that the world’s richest, most complex and most diversified culture would export its institutions and values alongside its manufactures.’<sup>49</sup>

Yet this presupposed an open and ready acceptance on the part of non-European subject cultures, which was at best rather naively optimistic, and at worst, as the brutal reality which met such overreaching idealism proved time and again, was violent resistance.<sup>50</sup> However, to Lord Palmerston the issue was plain:

‘It may be true in one sense, that Trade ought not to be enforced by Cannon Balls, but on the other hand Trade cannot flourish without security, and that security may often be unattainable without the Protection of physical force.’<sup>51</sup>

In the case of Tibet then we can see the convergence of twin themes, as previously outlined above, which perhaps constitute the greatest and most characteristically defining influences in the study of imperial borderlands – these are: questions of culture and questions of security. If empires adhere to a ‘language of power’, the spatial and temporal dynamics of imperial frontiers are shaped by these twin concerns. Peripheral borderland cultures usually fall under

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<sup>48</sup> Kenneth Pomeranz, ‘Empire & “Civilizing” Missions, Past & Present’ in *Daedalus*, Vol. 134, No. 2, (Spring, 2005), pp. 34-45

<sup>49</sup> Darwin, *Unfinished Empire*, pp. 28-29; see also, Marc-William Palen, ‘Adam Smith as Advocate of Empire, c.1870-1932’, in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 57, Issue 1 (March, 2014), pp. 179-198

<sup>50</sup> A potent example being the uprising which at the time was commonly referred to as the ‘Indian Mutiny’ of 1857; see, J. P. C. Laband, ‘The Nature of the Indian Mutiny: A Changing Concept’ in *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, No. 46 (May, 1976), pp. 27-39

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in, Darwin, *Unfinished Empire*, p. 29

the scrutiny of the Imperial centre for reasons of uncertainty regarding allegiance and trust – are they inside the empire or outside of it? Friend or foe? Suzerain or suspect? This is why frontiers are often fuzzy and fluid liminal zones, as politically they tend to be pushed and pulled on all sides.

Tibet at the start of the twentieth century was completely surrounded by three large Imperial powers, each characterised by their mutually antagonistic rivalries. This meant that Tibet was a highly contested liminal zone – recurrently washed over by the succeeding tides of conquest and resistance in its long history, it thus became the last covert fighting ground in the Great Game. Whoever commanded Tibet's allegiance would thereby secure the winning hand. Hence the next chapter will examine how the three British consular officers – Louis Magrath King, Oliver Coales, and Eric Teichman – came to be stationed at a remote outpost in the hills of western China.

## Chapter Two – A Clash of Colonial Perspectives

In the British official mind Tibet had long been viewed as a ‘suzerain’ state of the Chinese Empire, yet despite his repeated efforts Lord Curzon was unable to alleviate his concerns regarding speculations of growing Russian influence within Tibet through communications with the Chinese Imperial Court. Indeed, he eventually came to the weary conclusion that Chinese authority over Tibet was in reality nothing more than a ‘constitutional fiction.’<sup>52</sup> Consequently, if he could not secure a reliable line of communication with Tibet via Peking he would have to establish it directly with Lhasa, even if this meant deliberately provoking an armed confrontation with the Tibetans. Hence in 1904 he despatched Francis Younghusband at the head of an expeditionary force which fought its way to the Tibetan capital.<sup>53</sup> Younghusband and Curzon were old friends who had travelled together in Afghanistan, and they were of one mind as to the ultimate moral goodness and right of the British to rule ‘inferior races.’ Just as Afghanistan had been fought for and set up as a buffer between Russia and British-India in the west, so too could Tibet in the east. The Tibetan armed resistance, though strong in will, was no match for the modern British Maxim gun – in one confrontation it was estimated that some seven hundred Tibetan soldiers armed only with antiquated matchlock rifles were cut down in just four minutes.<sup>54</sup>

The ultimate political outcome of the military incursion was the establishment of three recognised trade marts within Tibet, plus the permanent stationing of a British trade agent at Gyantse, relatively close enough to Lhasa to be effective yet sufficiently removed – it was

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<sup>52</sup> Van Schaik, *Tibet*, p. 170; & MacGregor, *Tibet*, p. 307

<sup>53</sup> See, Anthony Verrier, ‘Francis Younghusband and the Great Game’ in *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 23, Issue 1 (1992), pp. 34-43

<sup>54</sup> Hopkirk, *Trespassers on the Roof of the World*, p. 175

hoped – not to ruffle the Chinese authorities, nor their agents in the Tibetan capital. For the next ten years the British were satisfied with this foothold as it ensured their increasing influence in Tibet, and had successfully seen off similar aspirations on the Russian side; yet a number of issues were left lingering in the British view, wanting to be resolved – particularly in relation to the official demarcation of each territory. Notably these issues arose from a distinctly European ‘geo-political’ worldview which was based on notions of sovereignty as clearly defined in a ‘nation-state’ system.<sup>55</sup> However, this is where the British, the Tibetans, and the Chinese differed most.<sup>56</sup>

Ultimately the difficulties stemmed from respective differences in cultural as well as political perceptions. To the British, the geo-political realities seemed clear: a particular territory was best defined by drawing lines on a map – a good, scientifically surveyed and topographically accurate map. To the Tibetans and the Chinese the concept of a particular territory was much more fluid and was usually defined by factors which were informed by more relativistic *human* terms, i.e. – subtleties relating to fealties and alliances needed to be taken into consideration; notions of client-patron ties which could easily (or confusingly) overlap – rather than linear, map-drawn boundaries.<sup>57</sup> For instance, particularly in Tibet, a single valley could owe its political allegiance to one local overlord, yet come under the religious jurisdiction of a monastery situated in an entirely different locale altogether, and each of these two realities could have a bearing upon both political and economic aspects of everyday life in that particular valley. This is something which the British increasingly became aware of, hence why it is important for historians today looking at this area at this

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<sup>55</sup> See, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991); James Hevia, *The Imperial Security State: British Colonial Knowledge and Empire-Building in Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 5-8

<sup>56</sup> McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj*, pp. 220-222

<sup>57</sup> See, Lin Hsiao-ting, ‘The Tributary System in China’s Historical Imagination: China and Hunza, ca.1760-1960’ in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland*, Vol. 19, Issue 4 (2012), pp. 489-507; Steven A. Hoffmann, ‘Rethinking the Linkage between Tibet and the China-India Border Conflict: A Realist Approach’ in *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2003), pp. 165-194

time to consider contemporary systems of ‘knowledge gathering’ alongside recent theories of ‘borderland processes’ in order to gain a more comprehensive and informed overview of what the situation on the ground was like on all sides as well as within the contested ground itself.<sup>58</sup>

Writing in the journal *American Antiquity* in 2006, historian Bradley Parker proposed a set of criteria which he hopes will help define the terminology, models, and conceptual frameworks by which a cross-disciplinary base of academics can unify their respective approaches towards the examination of such borderland processes.<sup>59</sup> He argues that simple terms such as ‘boundary’, ‘border’, and ‘frontier’ are not necessarily as straightforwardly interchangeable as they might at first appear. For instance, the word *boundary* may be given as a term by which to define the ‘bounds’ or ‘limits’ of something’s extent. Similarly, *borders* can be said to demarcate space by ‘linear’ or ‘dividing’ lines. Whereas, *frontiers* are more often seen as less clearly defined ‘zones’ – these zones are frequently overlapping rather than congruent; hence, within these zones, political, economic, geographical, and cultural boundaries may overlap or interpenetrate to varying or differing degrees. Parker suggests that frontiers are best viewed as a ‘complicated matrix of overlapping boundaries,’ consequently, what occurs in borderland regions is rarely ‘uni-causal.’<sup>60</sup>

It is interesting to note how these contemporary categories for viewing borderlands clearly resonate with the processes of ‘knowledge gathering’ which would have been readily familiar to colonial operators at the beginning of the last century. Consequently, with the increasing significance of borderland studies across academic disciplines, it is perhaps not

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<sup>58</sup> See, Michiel Baud & Willem Van Schendel, ‘Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands’ in *Journal of World History*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Fall, 1997), pp. 211-242; Laura Hoestetler, ‘Qing Connections to the Early Modern World: Ethnography and Cartography in Eighteenth-Century China’ in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (July, 2000), pp. 623-662; David Vumllallian Zou & Satish Kumar, ‘Mapping a Colonial Borderland: Objectifying the Geo-Body of India’s Northeast’ in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 70, Issue 1 (February, 2011), pp. 141-170

<sup>59</sup> See, Bradley J. Parker, ‘Toward an Understanding of Borderland Processes’ in *American Antiquity*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (January, 2006), pp. 77-100

<sup>60</sup> Parker, ‘Toward an Understanding of Borderland Processes’, p. 80

altogether too surprising to note the close similarities given the recent rise to analytical prominence of ‘knowledge and empire’ as a theme for historians interested in the era of late western imperial expansion.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, as Tony Ballantyne has observed:

“‘Knowledge’ has emerged as a key problematic for historians of empire, and much recent work has focused on the construction of colonial knowledge and the role of knowledge production in the creation and projection of colonial authority. Because printing was central to the working of modern colonial states, and because it stands at the junction of several key fields of historical analysis – the history of the modern state itself – it has become an important point of debate in the scholarship on modern empire building.”<sup>62</sup>

Printing, as we shall see in Chapter 5, was certainly of great importance to the dissemination of information – both geographical and political, private and public – which resulted from the secret mission to which the three British officials examined in this study were assigned. It is notable that examples can be found in abundance to demonstrate that all empires have found the gathering of both covert and public ‘information’ was a significant key to power.<sup>63</sup>

Indeed, in the case of the British in India, the roots of these practices, and even some of their sources, were directly inherited by the original East India Company executives from the Mughal administration they effectively supplanted in Bengal, and which thereby they used and subsequently built upon. As Christopher Bayly has described:

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<sup>61</sup> See, Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands*, pp. 59-64

<sup>62</sup> Tony Ballantyne, ‘What Difference Does Colonialism Make? Reassessing Print and Social Change in an Age of Global Imperialism’ in Sabrina Alcorn Baron, Eric N. Lindquist, and Eleanor F. Shevlin (eds.), *Agent of Change: Print Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), p. 343

<sup>63</sup> See, Hevia, *The Imperial Security State*; C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

‘The few available studies of the form of indigenous records suggest that these could be statistically rich. Yet they were single-purpose, devoted to taxation of houses in a bazaar or the computation of land-revenues, or separate political intelligence. The Company, however, began to build up banks of multi-purpose social data in conformity with the European science of statistics. Indian data had apparently been ‘flat’ historically in general, looking back to rights and duties previously established. Company data was adjusted to fit ideas of economic and moral improvement which could potentially rank all societies, within and outside India, in a global hierarchy and pattern of development. The information so collected might or might not be used actually to prosecute such improvement, but it certainly had the effect of reinforcing Europeans’ notions of their own historical superiority.’<sup>64</sup>

For this combination of reasons then, an official mind-set emerged in British Imperial India, which would outlast Curzon’s tenure as Viceroy. This set of officials has since been described by the historian, Alex McKay, as “the frontier cadre.”<sup>65</sup> However, their actions and influence soon came to extend beyond the boundaries of India and Tibet, drawing in officials from both the Foreign and India Offices, and most notably for this study – the British Consular Service in China as well.

With the success (from the British viewpoint) of the Younghusband mission to Tibet and the overwhelming assertion of British power in the region, thereby upholding the all-important

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<sup>64</sup> C. A. Bayly, ‘Knowing the Country: Empire and Information in India’ in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (February, 1993), pp. 33-34

<sup>65</sup> See, McKay, *Tibet and the Raj*. Three other notable historians who have worked extensively on this group are Alistair Lamb, Melvyn Goldstein, and Parshotam Mehra (see bibliography)

notion of British ‘prestige,’ the threat of Russian influence (if it was ever credibly there in the first place) certainly receded, only to be replaced by concerns arising to prominence with regard to a different imperial power – namely China.<sup>66</sup> The British military action in Tibet in 1904 roused the Chinese Imperial authorities to a similar action of their own. In 1906 the ailing Manchu Court authorised an impressive military advance into East Tibet in order to re-establish and unequivocally assert their authority over their ‘suzerain’ Tibetan neighbours. The military push, led by the uncompromisingly ruthless General Zhao Erfeng (Chao Erh-feng), ‘cut a swathe through Batang and Litang, replacing local chiefs with Chinese officials and slaughtering those who opposed him with startling violence.’<sup>67</sup> In many respects, as Sam van Schiak has observed, Zhao was almost the mirror-image of Younghusband, demonstrating an imperialist’s marked disdain for ‘inferior’ cultures. Yet unlike Younghusband, Zhao was perhaps even more of an imperialist as he resolutely remained in East Tibet for many years, working hard to reshape local polities into recognised units of Chinese administration, even attempting at one point to side-step a promotion to the regional governorship of Sichuan in order to see the job through.<sup>68</sup> Zhao’s brutality left a deep mark on the region, where he became known amongst the people of Kham, the largest region of East Tibet, as ‘Zhao the Butcher.’<sup>69</sup> Yet, as Van Schiak notes, Zhao ‘saw himself quite differently. Like most Chinese of the time, he regarded Tibetans in general and Khampas in particular as barbarians, and saw himself as a bringer of civilisation.’<sup>70</sup> In this respect the

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<sup>66</sup> For an examination of Qing perceptions regarding the frontiers of its empire and its policies towards engaging with the wider world beyond, see: Matthew W. Mosca, ‘The Qing State and its Awareness of Eurasian Interconnections, 1789-1806’ in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (Winter, 2014), pp. 103-116

<sup>67</sup> Van Schiak, *Tibet*, p. 183

<sup>68</sup> See, Elliot Sperling, ‘The Chinese Venture in K’am, 1904-1911, and the Role of Chao Erh-feng’ in *The Tibet Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1976), pp. 10-36

<sup>69</sup> Eric Teichman, *Travels of a Consular Officer in Eastern Tibet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), pp. 36-37

<sup>70</sup> Van Schiak, *Tibet*, p. 183

British colonial *raison d'être* was of a broadly similar ethos to that of the Manchu Qing Empire.<sup>71</sup>

In many respects the Manchus were seen in China itself as colonisers of a kind.<sup>72</sup> They were originally a race of nomadic outsiders who had swept down from the north-western province of Manchuria in 1644 and replaced the ruling Ming dynasty, effectively assimilating their ruling elite into the established sedentary Han Chinese culture, adopting Chinese ways whilst skilfully maintaining their Manchu identity in a delicately refined balancing act.<sup>73</sup> Despite this fact though, through the centuries, there were many Ming loyalists who resented Manchu Qing rule.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, when the Republican Xinhai revolution took hold in China in 1911, some of the reprisals meted out against prominent Manchu Qing officials was ruthless and uncompromising. Zhao was certainly a prime target as one of the Manchu elite, consequently he was caught and summarily executed by the Republican revolutionaries soon after the revolution occurred – several grim photographs of his execution and his decapitated body have been preserved in the Foreign Office archives now held in the National Archives at Kew.<sup>75</sup>

Empires may superficially seem like giant monoliths immovably rooted in their own longevity, yet it is important to recognise that in reality they are never static entities. If we return to the theme of space and time, we can see that although it was certainly a long-lived empire, spatially and temporally the geographical borders of China itself had naturally

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<sup>71</sup> Michael Adas, 'Imperialism and Colonialism in Comparative Perspective', in *The International History Review*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (June, 1998), pp. 371-388

<sup>72</sup> Peter C. Perdue, 'Comparing Empires: Manchu Colonialism', in *The International History Review*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (June, 1998), pp. 255-262; Nicola Di Cosmo, 'Qing Colonial Administration in Inner Asia', *The International History Review*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (June, 1998), pp. 287-309

<sup>73</sup> See, Albert Feuerwerker, *State and Society in Eighteenth-Century China: The Ch'ing Empire in its Glory* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1976)

<sup>74</sup> See, Rowe, *China's Last Empire*, Chapter 7, & regarding the role of 'anti-Manchuism' in the Xinhai Revolution, pp. 279-280

<sup>75</sup> See, NA FO 228/1838, To and From Chengtu-Foochow (1912)

expanded and contracted in tandem with its political, military, and economic fortunes. Using the example of China's famous 'Great Wall', Owen Lattimore has summed up the mutable essence of imperial frontiers with an apposite metaphor:

'[T]he fact that there are many variant, alternative, and supplementary lines of Great Wall fortification, which may be studied as the tidemarks of different historical periods, proves that the concept of a linear boundary could never be established as an absolute geographical fact. That which was politically conceived as a sharp edge was persistently spread by the ebb and flow of history into a relatively broad and vague margin.'<sup>76</sup>

At the start of the twentieth century Tibet became a central point of focus for both Britain and China. In terms of colonially contested frontiers Tibet perhaps represented a high watermark which reached its spring-tideline at the Simla Conference of 1913-1914. As Alex McKay has noted:

'The British and the Chinese struggled to establish a controlling influence in Tibet throughout the 1904-47 period. Both sent representatives to influence and control the country. They used similar methods, copied the other's initiatives, and constantly measured their opponent's successes and failures against their own. The slightest indication of Tibetan preference for one country's ideas, actions, and even sports and pastimes, was seized upon as evidence that the Tibetans favoured that country and hence its policies. Both sides claimed their involvement was in the Tibetans' best interests, but the

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<sup>76</sup> Owen Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (New York: Capitol Publishing Co. & American Geographical Society, 1951), p. 238

Tibetans' desire for isolation and control of their own affairs was totally ignored.<sup>77</sup>

Unlike the Chinese after 1950, the British never sought to exert direct control over Tibet. And similarly the Manchu government only ever sought to impose direct Chinese territorial authority over certain portions of East Tibet.<sup>78</sup> Both the British and the Manchus were of the same imperialist mind-set as regards to establishing Tibet proper (i.e. West Tibet – or the areas traditionally directly under control of the Lhasa ruling elite) as a 'buffer' state in accordance with the idea of securing a controlling political influence rather than a direct political or military administration over Tibet.<sup>79</sup> This again returns us to the question of differing cultural perceptions on the part of all three polities.

Whilst Britain and China could reasonably view each other as equals (in terms of imperial status), Tibet was not by any means on a relative par with either of the two powers – arguably it was not even an independent 'nation-state' (as Europeans might understand that term). As McKay continues:

'Tibet had no standard procedure for conducting relations with its neighbours, nor did it have a bureaucratic class. While Tibetan traders travelled widely in Asia, their central economic system was primitive and functioned largely by barter. There was no industrial or mechanical development and even the wheel was only used in a religious context, not as a means of transport.

While Tibet was not a modern nation-state and was largely oblivious to the outside world, Tibetans had a definite identity. This was based on racial,

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<sup>77</sup> McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj*, pp. 16-17

<sup>78</sup> See, Francis Watson, *The Frontiers of China* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), Chapter 3

<sup>79</sup> NA FO 405/208, Grey to Goschen, 7 February 1912; see also, McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj*, pp. 13-14 & 63-64

cultural and linguistic distinctness from their neighbours and on the collective understanding of a shared history, mythology and traditions.’<sup>80</sup>

Indeed, arguably until the intervention of Europeans and the subsequent global shift towards set ideas of rigid ‘nationalisms,’ the political landscape of Central Asia was very much defined by shifting regional boundaries. Throughout the wider Central Asian region different polities had risen and receded from prominence over time. Such historical fluctuations have since been used as evidence to support competing claims and counter-claims in various contentious attempts to settle and fix these polities in the modern era, as was the case with the 1913-1914 conference held at Simla.<sup>81</sup>

In this sense, it can be seen that Tibet has always found itself at the centre of a contested chessboard of empires and nations,<sup>82</sup> at one time even previously rising to prominence and supremacy itself. During the Tang dynasty era in China, when Tibet was consolidated under the rule of the *tsenpos* (kings), the Tibetans aggressively expanded the limits of their borders by pushing into Chinese territory and ultimately forcing the Tang to recognise an official Sino-Tibetan border which was set down on terms wholly dictated by the Tibetans in 822. A pillar marking this edict still stands today in the Tibetan capital, Lhasa. Originally one of three – the other two having been set up in the Tang capital, Chang’an, and on the Sino-Tibetan border itself in Qingshui (on the eastern edge of today’s province of Gansu) – the pillar at Lhasa gives the terms of the treaty and a history of the events leading up to it, as well as the names of the Chinese and Tibetan signatories. Whilst the treaty was

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<sup>80</sup> McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj*, p. 17

<sup>81</sup> For a concise overview of the relations between Tibet and China: see, Tashi Tsering, ‘A Brief Survey of Fourteen Centuries of Sino-Tibetan Relations’ in *The Tibet Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2011), pp. 63-81

<sup>82</sup> Here again we can see the metaphor of gaming was quite commonly used with regard to contemporary geopolitics: “The Tibetans are but the smallest pawns on the political chessboard, but castles, knights, and bishops may all be involved in trying to take that pawn.” – BL, Curzon Papers, F111/160, Lord Hamilton to Lord Curzon, 22 August 1901; quoted in Premen Addy, *Tibet on the Imperial Chessboard: The Making of British Policy Towards Lhasa, 1899-1925* (Calcutta & New Delhi: Academic Publishers, 1984), p. 82

certainly established under Tibetan terms it is notable that the Tibetans still permitted a concession to Chinese sensibilities, therein acknowledging China's sense of cultural superiority over Tibet, describing the relationship between the two peoples as being like that of the relationship between 'a father-in-law and a son-in-law' – such poetic finessing of the 'legalese' notably gave a tacit nod to the past, wherein Chinese princesses had been given in diplomatically orchestrated marriages to Tibetan *tsempo*s, and perhaps rather cannily lent itself to a variety of suitably ambiguous interpretations on both sides.<sup>83</sup>

This early period of Tibetan 'empire' was not to last, however. Tibet's subsequent history is chequered with internal rivalries, bloody coups, and violent attacks from outsiders alike. Indeed, during one such period of internal weakness, Tibet later came under the sway of forces from Mongolia, who were in turn displaced by Manchu forces in 1720.<sup>84</sup> The Kangxi Emperor effectively enabled the installation of the seventh Dalai Lama at Lhasa, thereby re-establishing Tibetan control, whilst simultaneously absorbing the eastern Tibetan provinces of Amdo and Kham into Qinghai and Sichuan.<sup>85</sup> Notably, each of these historical precedents were presented and discussed at the negotiations in Simla several centuries later.<sup>86</sup>

The Tripartite Conference at Simla was convened in October 1913 and ran until July 1914. The delegates of the respective governments participated as equals. Sir Henry McMahon attended on behalf of British-India; a Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, Mr Ivan Chen (Chen Yi-fan), represented China; and Tibet was represented by its Prime Minister, Lonchen Shatra Paljor Dorje. The issues they discussed ranged from questions relating to

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<sup>83</sup> See, Van Schiak, *Tibet*, pp. 41-46

<sup>84</sup> See, Peter Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA.; Belknap, 2005)

<sup>85</sup> See, Van Schiak, *Tibet*, pp. 136-145

<sup>86</sup> For an excellent and detailed analysis of the attempted Simla and later Rongbatsa agreements, see: Carole McGranahan, 'From Simla to Rongbatsa: The British and the "Modern" Boundaries of Tibet' in *The Tibet Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Winter, 2003), pp. 39-60

Tibet's political status; external trading rights within Tibet; the posting of British and Chinese representatives in Tibet; and, the demarcation of Tibet's geographical borders.

At this point in time, China was in a particularly weakened position with respect to its prior dominance over Tibet as a whole and eastern Tibet in particular. Following the Republican Xinhai Revolution in China the Tibetan authorities had expelled the Chinese *Amban*, its historic representative at the Dalai Lama's Court in Lhasa, and the Tibetan Armed Forces had pushed back against the late-imperial Manchu colonisation effort, reclaiming much of the territory which China had gained under the efforts of Zhao Erfeng. Indeed, if it had not been for the negotiations convened at Simla in 1913, it seems likely that the Tibetan Army would have pushed on all the way to Tachienlu (Dartsendo), which, historically, had always been viewed as the 'ethnic boundary' of Tibet even when it was under direct Chinese control. Instead they maintained their line further to the west, roughly along the natural border formed by a river known locally as the Driчу (the head water of the Yangtze kiang).<sup>87</sup> Alistair Lamb has stated that the Tibetan Army in the East was a relatively small force, yet under the astute command of Champa Tendar, the Kalon Lama, the Tibetan Army was repeatedly able to frustrate any Chinese advances by isolating the respective regional factions within the rival Republican armies; had the forces of Gansu and Yunnan united with those of Sichuan in a combined push they would almost certainly have overrun the Tibetan Army completely.<sup>88</sup> Such a concerted push was perhaps only a matter of time depending on how long it took the new Chinese Republic to get their own house in order.

Clearly the fragmentation of the so-called 'Warlord era' of the early Republic allied with the diplomatic assistance of the British at Simla offered the Tibetans their best chance at maintaining some degree of autonomy. As a result they were willing to accept a solution

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<sup>87</sup> See, Sperling, 'The Chinese Venture in K'am'; Teichman, *Travels of a Consular Officer in Eastern Tibet*, pp. 41-44

<sup>88</sup> See, Alistair Lamb, 'The Situation in 1914' in Alex McKay (ed.), *History of Tibet, Vol. 3: The Modern Period: 1895-1959, The Encounter with Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 142-143

which gained them a partial independence when McMahon suggested a scheme whereby the Tibetan territory would be divided into ‘Inner’ and ‘Outer’ zones.<sup>89</sup> The proposal was initially agreed by all three plenipotentiaries at the conference, but the Chinese Government in Nanjing refused to allow its representative to sign and thereby ratify the final accord, which was subsequently signed by British-India and Tibet alone. And as such, the Tibetans faithfully adhered to the principle of the “McMahon Line”, even after the British had withdrawn their imperial interests from the area when India regained its independence in 1947, until a stronger China eventually returned in 1950, when the People’s Liberation Army made a decisive final advance; one which pushed far beyond that achieved by Zhao Erfeng in 1906, thereby incorporating Tibet as a whole into the new People’s Republic of China.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj*, p. 63

<sup>90</sup> See, Watson, *The Frontiers of China*, Chapter 4

### Chapter Three – Science and Surveillance

The execution of Zhao Erfeng in 1912 left a power vacuum on the Sino-Tibetan frontier which allowed the Tibetans to reassert a nominal degree of control in the borderland region. Yet Tibetan military power was relatively weak, and consequently the British were wary of a renewed military intervention being asserted by the Chinese, hence in October 1913 Louis Magrath King reached Tachienlu and began to set up a consular out-post there. The journey to Tachienlu from Chengdu was not a particularly straightforward one at the best of times, and in the decades following the Republican revolution the political situation in west China added a layer of yet further complication.<sup>91</sup> Throughout this period rival factions of the Republican Army constantly fought each other for control – notably the armies respectively loyal to the Generals in Yunnan and Sichuan fought each other in a chaotic period marked by treacherous alliances and strategic deceptions, some of the roots of which can arguably be traced back to the rebellions which occurred in the late-Imperial era under the Manchu Qing.<sup>92</sup> Factors which defined the motivations of these Generals were multifaceted and by no means straightforward. Strong elements of personal or clan interests could sit side-by-side with, or frequently override the broader interests of Republican ideology. Similarly the regular troops serving under these Generals could easily desert or be swayed to switch allegiances depending on the relative solvency of their commanders. A lack of pay was often a cause of discontent which could lead troops to mutiny and increase instances of

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<sup>91</sup> See, NA FO 228/1971, Chengtu Accounts 7 (1916) – for Coales’s expenses for travel from Chengdu to Tachienlu; D. C. Graham, ‘A Trip to Tatsienlu’ in *The West China Border Research Society Journal*, Vol. 2 (1924-1925), pp. 33-37; Flora Beal Shelton, *Shelton of Tibet* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1923), Chapter 2

<sup>92</sup> See, Hsi-sheng Ch’i, *Warlord Politics in China, 1916-1928* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), Chapter 2

lawlessness, looting and ‘brigandage’ in the volatile region.<sup>93</sup> As W. Meyrick Hewlett, the British Consul-General at Chengdu from 1916 to 1922, observed: ‘In a wealthy province like Szechuan [Sichuan], where the Salt Revenue alone produced from £80,000 to £140,000 a month, it was well worth while holding the position of Military Governor for a few months.’<sup>94</sup>

Ordinarily the duties of a consul in China were far more varied than those stationed in other parts of the world. As Stanley Lane-Poole summarises:

‘His relations were with the provincial authorities, instead of with the Foreign Office of the country, and these provincial authorities were singularly independent of the Central Government in matters of detail, and capable of causing serious mischief by the exercise of their personal tastes and dislikes. To them the Consul had to refer in all cases relating to his duties, which were tolerably extensive. His functions were not merely commercial, but political, judicial, one might almost say universal.’<sup>95</sup>

The consuls of the China Service had roles which were closer to those of diplomats, and as such the exercise of careful ‘tact and diplomacy’ were essential to their maintaining good relations with the local Chinese elite, and this was no less the case during the fractious and uncertain times which followed the Xinhai Revolution, as Hewlett again describes from his own personal experience in Sichuan:

‘If you were a personal friend of the War Lord you were courteously received, usually with a guard of honour, but if you were unknown the sentries and attendants had a

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<sup>93</sup> See, Ch’i, *Warlord Politics in China, 1916-1928*, Chapter 3

<sup>94</sup> Sir W. Meyrick Hewlett, *Forty Years in China*, (London: Macmillan, 1943), p. 188; Hewlett gives the following dates for his time at Chengdu: 29 September 1916 – 12 April 1919 & 28 February 1920 – 9 November 1922 (see, p. 85), consequently he had dealings with all three of the consuls sent to Tachienlu

<sup>95</sup> Stanley Lane-Poole, *The Life of Sir Harry Parkes: Sometime Her Majesty’s Minister to China & Japan, Vol. 1, Consul in China* (London: Macmillan, 1894), pp. 68-72; see also, King, *China in Turmoil*, pp. 11-13

distinct tendency to be rude. I was always able to secure a private interview, though on certain occasions underlings and secretaries had an irritating way of hanging about. It is a mistake to think of the War Lords as ill-clad, badly-housed brigands. Far from it; practically all they did was on a grand scale, including the levying of taxes. They were delightful to meet, and the soul of generous hospitality. Moreover I found that if they trusted you it was fully and without reservation. If pure patriotism and not personal greed had been the foundation of their actions, I feel that with careful selection China could have easily produced some very great military leaders from among the War Lords [...].<sup>96</sup>

Undoubtedly an element behind the enhanced degree of ceremony invested in these meetings bolstered the perceived prestige of both parties and was therefore of mutual benefit for each to observe. Such ideas of pomp and prestige were perhaps of even greater importance in the borderland regions of the Sino-Tibetan frontier at this time. Louis King certainly reported that when meeting the Chinese commissioner he would always be preceded by a mounted messenger bearing his card, with two more mounted grooms immediately in front and behind him. When meeting the commanders of the local Tibetan militia his entourage was more substantial, consisting of a party of mounted and armed guards in order to secure his protection from ‘bandits’ as he crossed the no man’s land between the Chinese and Tibetan administered regions. On arrival the Tibetans duly received him with full military honours and ceremony.<sup>97</sup> The outward show of official dignity was no less observed when the two sides paid return calls on King. The Chinese Commissioner of the Frontier, General Ch’en Hsia-ling, apparently made a special point of having ‘expensive showy animals (for which he

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<sup>96</sup> Hewlett, *Forty Years in China*, pp. 188-190; see also, Joseph D. Lawson, ‘Warlord Colonialism: State Fragmentation and Chinese Rule in Kham, 1911-1949’ in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 72, Issue 2 (May, 2013), pp. 299-318

<sup>97</sup> See, NA FO 369/1592, King to Alston, 30 April 1921; King, *China in Turmoil*, pp. 187-188

pays as much as Rs. 1000 apiece) for himself and his bodyguard' and all would arrive 'mounted and in full rig, belts, pistols, etc.'<sup>98</sup> The Kalon Lama, Commander of the Tibetan Army in Kham, was even more conspicuous in his show of official decorum:

'[F]irst 5 or 6 high officials, the Kenching, Kenchungs etc, in resplendent silks and furs rode into my yard, dismounted and line up to receive their chief; then a dozen or so retainers gorgeously uniformed with His Excellency in their midst rode in, H. E. dismounted and with everybody bowing low was ushered into my apartments. The Kalon Lama was always carefully dressed in fine silks and furs. On special occasions his display was greatly increased; himself in costly furs and resplendent apparel generally; his mount overburdened with gold and embroidered trappings; his saddle and bridle heavily mounted in pure gold; his men resplendent of uniform etc. The two reincarnate Lamas of Chamdo maintained little if any less display and the Dapons were very little less ornate.'<sup>99</sup>

As Louis King observed to Sir Beilby Alston, the British Minister at Peking, in a report from Tachienlu in 1921: 'This question of display in oriental countries may strike some people as affectation, but it is nevertheless of real importance and the man who refuses to conform to it merely adds to his own difficulties.'<sup>100</sup> Such considerations were clearly a key part of the political aspect of the intelligence officer on the frontier's role. As with so much of this imperialist Great Game dogma, the maintenance of 'prestige' was of paramount importance on all sides.<sup>101</sup> A position on such a frontier could easily lift an ordinary member of the overseas imperial service in ways which would be unimaginable back home in Britain.

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<sup>98</sup> NA FO 369/1592, King to Alston, 30 April 1921

<sup>99</sup> NA FO 369/1592, King to Alston, 30 April 1921; 'Kenchung' or 'Khenchung' – Local Administrator: see. McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj*, p. 124; 'Dapon' or 'Dabön' – General or Colonel in the Tibetan Army, literally: 'Lord of the Arrow': see, Teichman, *Travels of a Consular Officer in Eastern Tibet*, p. 24, footnote 1

<sup>100</sup> NA FO 369/1592, King to Alston, 30 April 1921

<sup>101</sup> McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj*, pp. 162-166

‘There,’ as Alex McKay has observed, ‘they had been from professional middle class backgrounds, yet in the empire they became the ruling class.’<sup>102</sup> Indeed, Louis King came from a family of several generations who had already lived and worked in China. His grandparents arrived as Christian missionaries in 1855, and his father had served over forty years in the Chinese Maritime Customs Service.<sup>103</sup> Oliver Coales was the son of a tutor, and Eric Teichman was born into a family of fur traders.<sup>104</sup> Clearly the significance of their posting on the Sino-Tibetan frontier was political in the broadest sense, not simply as a key listening post for both the British imperial interests in China and in India, but also locally too; as, by their exercise of the ‘tact and discretion’ expected of them, they managed to make themselves indispensable as mediators between the Chinese and Tibetan militias.<sup>105</sup>

This is not to say that life on the frontier was particularly easy. Life at Tachienlu was certainly bleak compared to a posting at one of the more regular treaty ports. As Louis King noted: ‘Apart from his work, he has to face a position of isolation unknown elsewhere in the service; he has no social life; no clubs; no dinner-parties, except Chinese; no bridge; no recreations of any kind; that game of tennis or polo or cross-country gallop that clears the mind of all worries and makes the body fit is not his.’<sup>106</sup> Not least having to deal amicably with a Chinese Frontier Commissioner who was certainly a ruthless authoritarian and deemed

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<sup>102</sup> McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj*, p. 164; see also, P. D. Coates, *The China Consuls: British Consular Officers, 1843-1943* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 421

<sup>103</sup> See, Tim Chamberlain, ‘Books of Change: A Western Family’s Writings on China, 1855-1949’ in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society China*, Vol. 75, No. 1 (2013), pp. 55-76; King’s grandfather, Rev. Alexander Williamson, also wrote a number of geographical works on China (see bibliography)

<sup>104</sup> Coates, *The China Consuls*, pp. 528 & 531; *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: Teichman, Sir Eric (1884-1944)* [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36448](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36448) - accessed 3 September 2014

<sup>105</sup> See, NA FO 369/1592, Alston to Curzon, Expenditure at Tachienlu, 26 February 1921, esp. notes by Lampton & Teichman; see also, Dorothy Woodman, *Himalayan Frontiers: A Political Review of British, Chinese, Indian and Russian Rivalries* (London: Barrie & Rockliff The Cresset Press, 1969), pp. 120, 164, 167 & 187

<sup>106</sup> NA FO 369/1592, King to Alston, 2 January 1921

by many to be semi-insane.<sup>107</sup> But the hardship, danger, and isolation were clearly all part and parcel of achieving greater ends:

‘First, we are here in the face of the Treaties; [...]. In this connection I have the honour to submit that it will always be necessary to maintain a Consular Officer on this Frontier and that his position would be easier if in the eventual Sino-Tibetan settlement it were laid down that a Consular officer should reside on the Frontier at such place or places as H.M. Government may decide, without having to consult the Chinese, to be most suitable from time to time. Second, the Consular officer here bears the brunt of the odium which the Chinese are pleased to cast upon Great Britain for her intervention in Sino-Tibetan affairs, an odium the more acute locally as this is the centre of China’s military concern in the matter and all Chinese, all reading Chinese, have long known that the Tibetan resistance is made possible by British rifles; in these regions these rifles have killed enough Chinese to make the matter a non-academical one. This odium was given considerable impetus by the late Shantung agitation which increased Chinese national spirit and interest in foreign affairs. It is liable to further increase. As it is the spirit of hostility towards Great Britain is very pronounced in Chinese circles on the frontier; even one’s personal friends cannot keep this feeling down. In the face of all this, the Consular officer has to hold up British prestige and at the same time carry on his sometimes delicate, intelligence work.’<sup>108</sup>

Given the difficulties of such a politically sensitive mission it is perhaps surprising that the results of some of their scientific efforts were made so publically available, in books, journal

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<sup>107</sup> NA FO 228/2960, King to Alston, 21 June-24 July 1920, plus Teichman’s note in margin agreeing that ‘Ch’en Hsia-ling is not mentally normal’; King to Teichman, 7 July 1920; see also, King, *China in Turmoil*, Chapter 1

<sup>108</sup> NA FO 369/1592, King to Alston, 2 January 1921

articles, and public lectures. An examination of this apparent anomaly will be the focus of the next chapter.

## Chapter Four – Politics and Publication

As part of their official duties on the frontier the three consuls were encouraged to make extended journeys across the border region. These journeys were in effect part of their reconnaissance work. They collected a variety of data whilst they were travelling. This data was primarily geographical, military, and economic. They would note routes and distances between towns; measure the altitude of mountain passes; estimate the heights of the most prominent peaks; note the number of troops located in particular areas, as well as estimate the total civilian populations of the towns; note the condition and type of trades and agriculture which operated in each inhabited valley, as well as noting the pastures and routes used by nomadic herdsmen; and, of course, report back on the administrative initiatives instigated by the Chinese or Tibetan authorities in terms of taxation or systems attempting to regulate the local economies.<sup>109</sup> Given the scientific nature of much of this reconnaissance work it is perhaps not altogether surprising that many of these frontier officials should turn their attentions to the less political side of such ‘scientific’ work. Indeed, they were often not alone in this sort of pursuit, as occasionally they rubbed shoulders in these out of the way places with both amateur and professional academics engaged in such fieldwork of their own.

Many frontier cadre officials amused themselves with pastimes such as hunting, shooting (or *shikar*) being a particular example, which at the time was ‘considered a perfectly

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<sup>109</sup> See, [King]: NA FO 228/2584, Vol. 357 Tibet (1914); FO 228/2963, Dossier 36 Tibet Vol. VIII (1922-1923); see also, FO 228/2583, Vol. 356 Tibet (1914); FO 228/2588, Vol. 360A (1915); & BL L/P&S/10/884, Tibet: Situation on the Sino-Tibetan Frontier (1922); [Coales]: NA FO 228/2749, Vol. 535 Tibet (1916-1917); & BL L/P&S/11/126, Tibet: The Eastern Marches (1917-1918); [Teichman]: NA FO 228/2956, Dossier 36 Tibet Vol. I (1918); FO 228/2957, Dossier 36 Tibet Vol. II (1918-1919); & BL L/P&S/11/155, Tibet: Eastern Tibet Affairs (1919)

proper activity for an officer and a gentleman.’<sup>110</sup> The necessity for carrying a rifle on the frontier for self-defence rather conveniently blurred into such gentlemanly pursuits as sport and science. As Alex McKay notes of Colonel F. M. ‘Eric’ Bailey when he was stationed at Gyantse:

‘A by-product of Bailey’s fondness for *shikar* was a zoo stocked with the offspring of his victims. At various times it housed monkeys, snow leopards, gazelles, wolves and a variety of other birds and animals. Bailey tried unsuccessfully to tame his animals and they invariably died. Luckily, he also collected skins and specimens of Tibetan flora and fauna, some previously unknown, for museums in Britain. This also provided a welcome supplement to his regular income.’<sup>111</sup>

Louis King did the same when he was at Tachienlu, where for a time he kept a wolf and two bear cubs.<sup>112</sup> He also collected a number of Tibetan religious artefacts which he donated to the British Museum in 1919, during his leave for wartime service with the Chinese Labour Corps.<sup>113</sup> Other semi-official travellers to the region, such as Brigadier-General George Pereira, who stayed with Louis King at Tachienlu over Christmas 1921, also took an amateur interest in botany, sending specimens back to the Royal Botanical Society in London.<sup>114</sup> Many of the missionaries who were stationed in the region also contributed to these amateur scientific endeavours; most of the Protestant missionaries doing so under the auspices of the

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<sup>110</sup> McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj*, p. 101

<sup>111</sup> McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj*, p. 102

<sup>112</sup> King, *China in Turmoil*, p. 207; Louis Magrath King, Family Papers, Photograph Album (containing photographs of bear cubs & wolf cub)

<sup>113</sup> Tim Chamberlain, ‘Edge of Empires’ in *The British Museum Magazine*, No. 66 (Spring/Summer, 2010), pp. 50-52

<sup>114</sup> The Royal Geographical Society (RGS), Pereira Papers, Diary 15 Feb 1921-23 June 1922, No. 67 & Folder I; some of his pressed flower specimens remain preserved amongst his papers held by the RGS; Pereira also appears to have donated panda and wolf skins to the Natural History Museum, London. He also corresponded with cadre officials, the British Government in India, and the Foreign Office in London; submitting hand-drawn maps, notes, and survey data: see, NA FO 228/1838, To and From Chengtu-Foochow (1912); 228/2962, Dossier 36 Tibet Vol. VII (1921-1922); FO 228/2963, Dossier 36 Tibet Vol. VIII (1922-1923); FO 228/2964, Dossier 36 Tibet Vol. IX (1923-1924); & BL L/P&S/10/1012-1, Tibet: Travellers (1921-1924)

‘West China Border Research Society’ which was based at the West China Union University in Chengdu (forerunner to today’s Sichuan University).<sup>115</sup> These missionaries, academics, and even western commercial agents were themselves often actively complicit in the gathering of local intelligence too, and some of their correspondence with cadre officials can be found amongst the Foreign Office papers now held at the National Archives.<sup>116</sup> Links were also forged with noted academics who conducted fieldwork on the frontier, such as the botanists, Ernest Henry Wilson, Joseph Rock, and Frank Kingdon Ward; the (father and son) geologists, J. W. & C. J. Gregory; the archaeologist, David Crockett Graham; and, the anthropologist, Paul Huston Stevenson.<sup>117</sup> There were also a number of noted independent female travellers too; such as, Isabella Bird, Elizabeth Kendall, and Alexandra David-Neel.<sup>118</sup> Many of these individuals had links with the Royal Geographical Society (RGS), and, as with Oliver Coales and Eric Teichman, published papers on their travels and research in the Society’s *Geographical Journal*.<sup>119</sup>

The RGS was really the main conduit for publishing this kind of scientific work.

Coales’ and Teichman’s articles show them each to be dedicated travellers, and the three

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<sup>115</sup> See, Jeff Kyong-McClain, ‘Missionary Archaeology on Republican China’s Southwestern Frontier’ in *The Newsletter (IIAS)*, No. 65 (Autumn, 2013), p. 4; Denise M. Glover, Stevan Harrel, Charles F. McKhann & Margaret Byrne Swain, (eds.), *Explorers & Scientists in China’s Borderlands, 1880-1950* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 2011), Chapters 6 & 7

<sup>116</sup> See, NA FO 228/2588, Mr Edgar’s Report on his Journey to Batang, 15 November 1915; FO 228/2964, Notes from Père Ouvrard of Tzu-Chung, 26 August 1923; Notes from Monsieur Peronne at A-tun-tzu, 31 August 1923; Notes at Yakalo from Père Goré, 11 September 1923; see also, McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj*, pp. 193-194

<sup>117</sup> See, Ernest Henry Wilson, *A Naturalist in Western China* (London: Methuen, 1913); Joseph F. Rock, ‘Through the Great River Trenches of Asia’ in *National Geographic Magazine*, Vol. 50, No. 2 (August, 1926), pp. 133-186; Frank Kingdon Ward, *A Plant Hunter in Tibet* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934); J. W. Gregory & C. J. Gregory, *To the Alps of Chinese Tibet* (London: Seeley Service & Co., 1923); D. C. Graham, ‘Archaeology in West China’ in *China Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (1937), pp. 172-174; Paul Huston Stevenson, ‘Notes on the Human Geography of the Chinese-Tibetan Borderland’ in *Geographical Review*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (October, 1932), pp. 599-616

<sup>118</sup> See, Isabella L. Bird, *Among the Tibetans* (New York: Dover Publications, 2004 [1894]); Elizabeth Kendall, *A Wayfarer in China: Impressions of a Trip Across West China and Mongolia* (London: Constable & Co., 1913); Alexandra David-Neel, *My Journey to Lhasa* (New York & London: Harper & Bros., 1927)

<sup>119</sup> Oliver Coales, ‘Eastern Tibet’ in *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (April, 1919), pp. 228-249, & ‘Economic Notes on Eastern Tibet’ in *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (October, 1919), pp. 242-247; Eric Teichman, ‘Journeys through Kam (Eastern Tibet)’ in *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (January, 1922), pp. 1-16

consuls clearly shared their information with each other freely. Teichman acknowledges both Louis King and Oliver Coales in the Preface to his book, *Travels of a Consular Officer in Eastern Tibet* (1922). One of Coales' RGS articles is illustrated with images credited to King.<sup>120</sup> Yet we might well ask how was it that three officials engaged in secret 'intelligence' work were able to publish such accounts of their travels? Part of the answer perhaps can be found in Teichman's own words:

'This book has no official imprimatur of any kind. No secrets are made public, nor, so far as the writer is aware, are there any to divulge. Most of the information contained in the historical introduction has been published at one time or another, in the works of Mr Rockhill, Mr Sandberg, and Sir Francis Younghusband [...], in Blue Books, and in the press. All that has been done is piece the various items of information together to make a consecutive story, which will, it is hoped, do something towards dispelling the fog of suspicion and misunderstanding which is apt to enshroud the Tibetan question.'<sup>121</sup>

A debate had been raging at the RGS since the 1890s as to the nature of its work, which was perceived by some of its members to be changing fundamentally – moving away from the rough speculative cartography of surveying and exploration towards the focussed scientific discipline of geography and geographical education.<sup>122</sup> In a sense, the three consuls who are the subject of this dissertation were the last of this line of old style imperialist explorers. Examining their published work, however, reveals three distinctly different men. On the surface Oliver Coales and Eric Teichman seem very much of the same mould; both Fellows

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<sup>120</sup> Coales, 'Eastern Tibet', plates between pp. 228 & 229

<sup>121</sup> Teichman, *Travels of a Consular Officer in Eastern Tibet*, p. ix; see also, BL L/P&S/ 11/211, 'A Brief History of the Relations between China, Tibet and India from Early Times up to the end of the year 1918', Eric Teichman (January, 1922)

<sup>122</sup> See, Peter Collier & Rob Inkpen, 'The RGS, Exploration and Empire and the Contested Nature of Surveying' in *Area*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (September, 2002), pp. 273-283

of the RGS, both assiduous in publishing the geographical results of their journeys. Louis King appears to have been more interested in the people of the frontier region. His book *China in Turmoil* (1927) is subtitled: *Studies in Personality*, and is very much interested in the psychology of such figures as General Ch'en Hsia-ling and the Kalon Lama, Champa Tendar. It is notable too that King married a Tibetan woman, Rinchen Lhamo, who he assisted in authoring a book on Tibetan culture: *We Tibetans* (1926), which is quite possibly the first genuine ethnography of Tibet. However, there is a distinction between Coales and Teichman. Coales seems more of the modern type of geographer whose outlook the RGS was moving towards embodying; Teichman's works, for all their claims to being without 'imprimatur' were very much underlined with their author's own political opinions (and by extension, those of the British Government too, as Teichman's career trajectory at this time saw him rising through the ranks of the Consular Service hierarchy). As Teichman lays out very clearly, continuing his Preface, by stating that:

'The writer has lived too long in China not to be imbued with regard for the Chinese and admiration of their many outstanding qualities. At the same time he cannot avoid strong feelings of sympathy with the Tibetans in their gallant struggle for autonomy and regret that the Chinese should in this case have placed themselves so much in the wrong.'<sup>123</sup>

Whilst the three men clearly shared a mutual professional respect as well as the scientific results of their route surveys, mapmaking efforts, and photographs, it seems they did not always share the same views as regards the political situation on the Sino-Tibetan stand-off. Perhaps, rather surprisingly, where Teichman's sympathies clearly favoured the Tibetans, Louis King – despite his marriage to a Tibetan woman – was more sympathetic towards the

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<sup>123</sup> Teichman, *Travels of a Consular Officer in Eastern Tibet*, pp. ix-x

Chinese. In a despatch from Tachienlu to Teichman in Peking he outlined at length why he thought the Tibetans were better off in the areas under Chinese administration than those under Tibetan control:

‘Tibetan officialdom looks upon the people as the natural prey of the ruling classes. Official posts are bought outright or are secured by favour for obligations due to individuals by the Government. For instance the Tibetan Government clearly looks upon the regions recently wrested from China in the light of “fat” job-producing places for deserving cases to be sent to. The Chungrang Dapon for instance has a powerful backing at Lhasa and successfully withstood the appointment of a civil governor of Derge, on the ground that he had captured Derge and was entitled to the post concurrently with his command. The civil official, a Kenchung, got as far as Chamdo and was recalled.

All officials merely look upon their jobs as opportunity to set themselves up for the rest of their lives. This is not so with Chinese officialdom. Chao [Zhao Erfeng] kept his official [sic] in order; the present Commissioner [Ch'en Hsia-ling], though mad enough in other ways, tries to keep the officials from excessive squeeze; many a Chinese official, notably of Draya and Mi of Chantui, are remembered with feelings of considerable respect and affection by their tribesmen. Never does a Tibetan official inspire anything but fear and a lukewarm tolerance if he happens to be better than others; they are all out for large squeeze, its [sic] the fault of their system of Government. Chinese officials have frequently a sense of responsibility towards their people, a pride in helping them, and a desire merely to get enough spoils to carry on with. This is true for most officials in the Manchu days, and true for many today; in spite of the great deterioration in this respect since the Revolution.

In this matter of squeezing, the point is briefly as follows: namely, Tibetan misrule in this respect is inherent in their system of government; whilst the Chinese, its [sic] a phase of disorder, and villainy in individuals, and in no sense inherent in the Chinese system or Chinese character.<sup>124</sup>

This close-typed despatch is covered with Teichman's hand written notes, observations, and corrections. As other archive papers and the historian Alistair Lamb have shown, King's views fell out of favour with the official position as it had been maintained by Sir Charles Bell and others to the fore of the frontier cadre, such that – using his unconventional (and unauthorised) marriage as a convenient pretext – he was eventually manoeuvred out of the Service altogether.<sup>125</sup> In certain regards it seems as though the books written by Louis King and his wife, Rinchen Lhamo, were framed in such a way as to assist in his suits to be reinstated when he unsuccessfully sued for unfair dismissal on the grounds of racial discrimination when a Labour Government came to power in 1929.<sup>126</sup> *China in Turmoil* purports to be a set of personality studies, yet it is far from clear exactly who the personalities described belong to in some of the chapters as they remain unnamed.

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<sup>124</sup> NA FO 228/2960, King to Teichman, 7 July 1920; Teichman has marked the last paragraph with a '?'. For Teichman's contrasting view of Tibetan vs. Chinese officials and administrations: see, Teichman, *Travels of a Consular Officer in Eastern Tibet*, pp. 163 & 193-194. King was not the only frontier officer whose career ended prematurely because his opinions did not fit with those of his superiors: see, McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj*, pp. 229-230

<sup>125</sup> NA FO 228/2963, Dossier 36 Tibet Vol. 8, King to Alston, 18 June 1922; Alistair Lamb, *Tibet, China and India, 1914-1950: A History of Imperial Diplomacy* (Hertingfordbury: Roxford Books, 1989), pp. 123-128; see also, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Special Collections, P.D. Coates, PPMS 52, Box 5, File 29, Notes of a Conversation with Ogden, 3 September 1973; Sir A.G.N. Ogden, PPMS 47, Box 17, Files 132 & 141

<sup>126</sup> NA FO 369/1885, Proposed Employment of Mr L.M. King on Intelligence Work in Central Asia (1925-1926); FO 369/2076, Mr Louis King's Application for Re-instatement in the China Consular Service (1929); FO 369/2129, Question of Re-instatement of Mr Louis King in the China Consular Service (1930); see also, Chamberlain, 'Books of Change', pp. 67-68

Despite their differences it appears Teichman and King remained on very good terms. Teichman even gave King financial assistance in later years,<sup>127</sup> and indeed, the very last line of King's unfinished autobiography is an unqualified compliment towards his consular colleague, of whom King wrote: 'Teichman must have been pretty well the best all-round man of our race who ever went East.'<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Louis Magrath King Family Papers, Teichman to King, 10 March 1930

<sup>128</sup> King, *The Five Coloured Clouds* (MS.); Teichman having retired to Norfolk was murdered on December 3, 1944 by an American soldier whom he disturbed poaching on the grounds of his estate, see: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: Teichman, Sir Eric (1884-1944)* [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36448](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36448) - accessed September 3, 2014; Oliver Coales also met an untimely death, although at a much younger age, after a sudden illness at Changsha in Hunan, China on 26 August 1926, see: W. S. T., Obituary, *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (February, 1927), p. 190; King died in 1949

## Conclusion – “The Man on the Spot”

‘We are very much indebted to the Consular Service for the valuable work which they do on the borders of the Chinese Empire. There is a wide field for their energies there, and we hope that more of them will come to the Geographical Society and be trained in surveying and other subjects, so that the information that they can bring back will be of all the more value.’<sup>129</sup>

This study of the work of three consular officials on special service on the Sino-Tibetan frontier has hopefully illustrated how the lines between ‘knowledge’ and ‘empire’ could become blurred in such liminal zones where borders and boundaries overlapped or merged in so many senses – both privately and publicly, scientifically and politically. Their knowledge gathering efforts in these key borderland regions served manifold ends: politically – in shaping imperialist policy; militarily – in keeping the metropole centre advised as to the realities of hostilities and cease-fire situations in the frontier regions; scientifically – in disseminating geographical information to a wider public (as well as an official, private) audience; and, personally – in terms of career building (or, in one case, destroying a career). Print culture, in the form of books and not least through the outlets of the RGS, allowed such information to be processed and disseminated, thereby serving the ends of both science and politics.<sup>130</sup> It showed that the British were at the forefront of gathering such information, and

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<sup>129</sup> Part of the closing comments made by Sir Francis Younghusband, as the President of the Royal Geographical Society, in the discussion after the presentation by Eric Teichman of his paper, entitled: ‘Journeys through Kam (Eastern Tibet)’ to the Society on 6 June 1921. See, Teichman, ‘Journeys through Kam (Eastern Tibet)’, pp. 1-16, for the complete lecture; the comment from the discussion quoted is given on p. 19.

<sup>130</sup> McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj*, pp. 225-227 & Chapter 15

by sharing that information it also showed they retained such control. As observed at the beginning of this study, the historian David Armitage has said that empire is essentially ‘a language of power.’<sup>131</sup> The officially sanctioned, overt dissemination of such knowledge, which in many respects was apparently gathered by semi-covert means, thus filtered out into the wider world freighted with a potent, underlying propaganda value which should not be undervalued.<sup>132</sup> It spoke of power and progress, civilisation and control – all the key ‘virtues’ which were then commonly held to embody the Western imperialist project. In this sense, ‘knowledge gathering’ was not simply a process facilitated by empire, in effect – ‘knowledge gathering’ *was* empire. And, as regards to such ‘knowledge gathering’, there was no imperial player of the Great Game more vital nor more key than – as the common parlance of the frontier cadre used to describe themselves: ‘the man on the spot.’<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Ludden, ‘The Process of Empire’, p. 133

<sup>132</sup> An example of this might be a short report of Oliver Coales’ lecture to an RGS meeting in London on 27 January 1919 which appeared in Singapore just a month and a half later, ‘In Unexplored Tibet: Pageant of the Great North Road: Traveller’s Experiences’, in *The Straits Times* (13 March 1919), p. 3 (National Library, Singapore: <http://newspapers.nl.sg/Digitised/Article/straitstimes19190313-1.2.5.aspx> - accessed 11 March 2014)

<sup>133</sup> See, McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj*, p. 210; Louis Magrath King, *The Five Coloured Clouds: Framework* (notebook associated with the unfinished MS., c.1947-1949), 1<sup>st</sup> Frontier & 2<sup>nd</sup> Frontier

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