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Fall 2012

# Chogyal's Sikkim: Tax, Land & Clan Politics

Hong Tran  
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# CHOGYAL'S SIKKIM:

# Tax, Land & Clan Politics

Author: Tran, Hong      Academic Advisor: Onians, Isabelle      Senior Faculty Advisor: Decler, Hubert  
Project Advisor: Mullard, Saul      Sending Institution: Yale      Major: Religious Studies      Location of Primary  
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## ABSTRACT

During the Chogyal (Tib. *chos rgyal*<sup>1</sup>) reign, the first and last monarchy in Sikkim, land and various forms of taxes derived from land ownership were powerful instruments of the ruling class, namely the Chogyal family, the aristocratic clans, and the royal lamas. It is the objective of this paper to examine the institution of land ownership and taxation as a reflection of the deeply seated and potent clan politics of Sikkim. Through available records and literature as well as interviews with head lamas, monastic affiliates and the Sikkimese public, using a combination of narratives and analysis, this author hopes to present a balanced, yet personal treatment of the subject. The research took place in West Sikkim, of which monasteries and heritage sites stood witness to the birth and development of the Chogyal government, making it an ideal location for this historical inquiry.

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<sup>1</sup> *Chos* means dharma while *rgyal* means ruler. When provided, the transcription of Tibetan words in this paper follows the Turrel V. Wylie's system.

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## INTRODUCTION

Among studies on the centralized and decentralized administration of various Himalayan kingdoms and states in the last millennium, there is a lamentable dearth of literature on taxation. Existing research on the topic is highly politicized, due to the controversy over the application of incriminating terminologies such as “feudalism” or “serfdom,” which were originally conceived in a medieval European context, loaded with implications that may or may not apply to social systems in this part of the world.<sup>2</sup> This research project hopes to fill the gap in the academic understanding of land administration in the cultural Tibetan world as a whole, and Sikkim in particular. Since taxation constituted the bulk of administrative governance for a Himalayan kingdom, an examination of the development of this fundamental institution may shed light on the political organization of the regime.

As many administrative archives were destroyed during Sikkim’s many military conflicts with Nepal, Bhutan and during the civil unrest leading to the 1975’s Sikkim integration into the Indian Union, the only comprehensive historical account of the founding and development of Chogyal-reigned Sikkim is “*History of Sikkim*,” compiled by Their Highnesses the Maharaja Sir Thutob Namgyal Chogyal and Maharani Yeshay Dolma of Sikkim in 1908, translated by Dawa Samdup. All the quotes and figures in the paper will then be reproduced as they appear in the royal account of Sikkim history.

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*Sikkim, also known as “Beyul Demojong” (Tib. Sbas yul ‘bras mo ljongs) meaning “Hidden Rice Valley”, or “Hidden Fruitful Valley” in another translation, is supposed to be the last Shangri-la left on earth. Discovered (and re-hidden!) by Guru Rinpoche or Guru Padma Sambhawa (“Guru that arose spontaneously from a lotus”), the great lama credited with bringing the light of Buddhism to the benighted land of Tibet and Sikkim in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Sikkim is supposed to be the ultimate spiritual refuge, “the king of all sacred places, equaling to Paradise itself.”<sup>3</sup>*

## THE MYTH OF SIKKIM

*The decal sticker on one of the trans-Sikkim jeeps lining up the taxi park in Gayzing, the district capital of West Sikkim, declares, the words gleaming on the glass pane reflecting the ubiquitous lushness of this bountiful land, “Oh Baby, Smile is Tax-free!” The sticker, spotted at a back of a vehicle in the only state in the Indian Union that enjoys the unprecedented status of income tax exemption, seems out of place. Why is Sikkim income tax-free? Most people think it is the compensation from her guilt-stricken overtaker, suggested by the very license plate of the jeep, which bears a large initialism of Sikkim “SK,” but not without the addition of a humble in size, yet assertive in import “IND.” In 1975, the kingdom of Sikkim ceased to exist, concurrently with the birth of Sikkim, the 22<sup>nd</sup> state of India. According to Mr. Pem Dorji, the R.C. (Revenue*

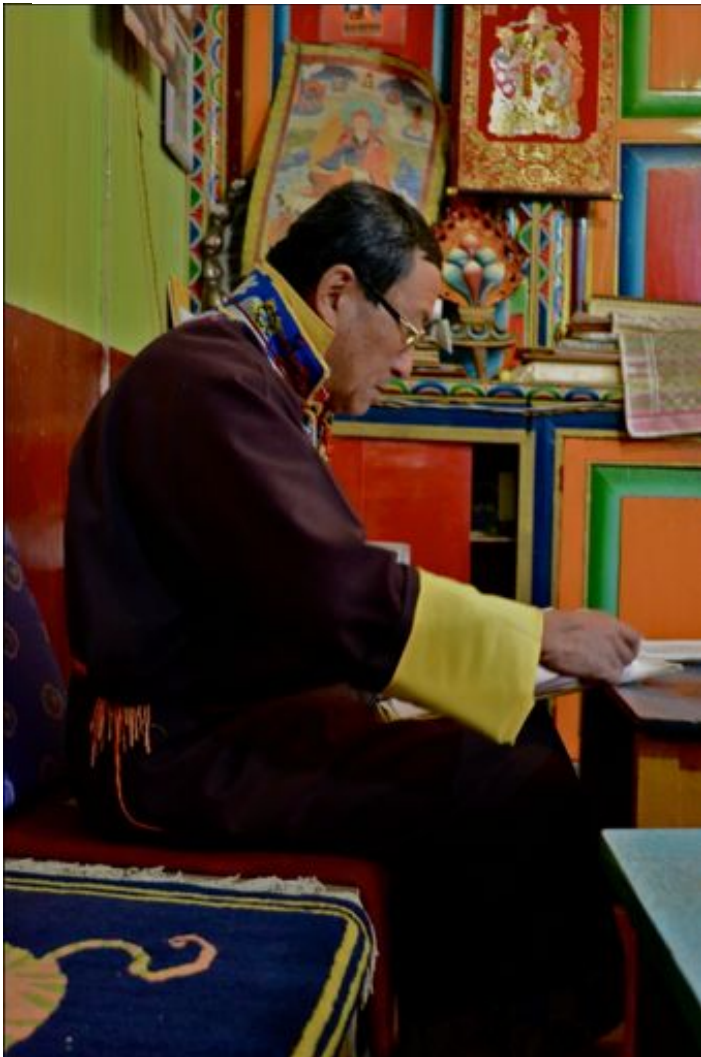
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<sup>2</sup> See (1) Goldstein, Melvyn C. “Serfdom and Mobility: An Examination of the Institution of “Human Lease” in Traditional Tibetan Society.” *Journal of Asian Studies*. 30.3 (1971): 521-534. Print. (2) Goldstein, Melvyn C. “Reexamining Choice, Dependency and Command in the Tibetan Social System: ‘Tax Appendages’ and Other Landless Serfs.” *The Tibet Journal* 11.4 (1986): 79-113. Print. (3) Goldstein, Melvyn C “Freedom, Servitude and the ‘Servant-serf’ Nyima: A Re-rejoinder to Miller.” *The Tibet Journal* 14, no. 2 (1989): 56-60. (4) Miller, Beatrice D. “Last Rejoinder to Goldstein on Tibetan Social System.” *The Tibet Journal* 13, no. 3 (1988): 64-66.

<sup>3</sup> Thutob Namgyal & Yeshay Dolma, *History of Sikkim* (Gangtok: 1908), 9.

Collector) at West Sikkim's administrative headquarter Tikchuk, before annexing Sikkim, the Indian government had to agree on certain terms in the treaty with the Chogyal, one of which is to maintain the status of income tax-free as before when Sikkim was a kingdom.<sup>4</sup> Yet one man has a different explanation: since the official founding of the kingdom in the 17<sup>th</sup> century up until 1975, Sikkim was a Buddhist monarchy and being a Buddhist in Sikkim is financially demanding enough that Buddhist Sikkimese can't conceivably pay for any other duties. That man is Captain Yongda, also known as Yagpo ("learned")Yongda.

Figure 1 Captain Yongda going through his legal archive in his shrine room.



Yagpo Yongda belongs to the Shangdarpa clan, one of the original four noble Lhopo clans Tong-du-ru-zhis. Entering Pemayangtse monastery at the age of four, following the lead of his illustrious father who was a councilor to the king, he became a phenomenon within the royal monastery when at the age of eleven, he passed the three rigorous scripture recitation examinations, ten years earlier than typically expected of a monk. "Never before, nor since," he beamed with pride. After graduating from the elite St. Joseph's College in Darjeeling, he held the titles of Chief Security Officer for the royal family, A.D.C (Aide De Camp), and Confidential Secretary for the Chogyal concurrently. During the tumultuous years of 1973-1975 he was detained many times by the Indian government. In 1980, he founded a school for the underprivileged tribal children of Sikkim called "Denjong Padma Cheoling Academy" and has acted as a full-time principal since.

On the subject of taxes, he pulled out a yellowed letter to show me; his big, callused thumbs barely registering the existence of the time-thinned paper. It was dated February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1989 addressed to Shri T.N. Pandey of Central Board of Direct Taxes, Ministry of Finance, Government of India.

The letter makes an interesting case for tax-exemption for Sikkim. In it, Captain Yongda gently reminds the readers that the Indian government has hitherto implicitly acknowledged Sikkim's theocentric *sui generis* by carving out an Ecclesiastical Bureau, the only one in the whole country, within the state government of Sikkim and earmarking a unique seat for a representative of the *sangha* (Buddhist community) in the state legislative assembly.<sup>5</sup> He then seamlessly translates the religious argument into an economic one, by introducing some sort of religious duty, the only form of financial obligation in Sikkim, starting from the third Chogyal Chagdor

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Pem Dori. Interview, November 27<sup>th</sup> 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Captain Yongda, A letter to Ministry of Finance, Government of India, Pelling, The World Fellowship of Buddhists, Sikkim Regional Centre, February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1, 1989.

Namgyal. The duty consists of setting up of a “unit of monastery” (*lhakang* or the shrine room) in every home, abiding by the coenobitic conscription of one son per household and setting aside enough estates to fund costly religious prerequisites. These prerequisites, in particular, involve commissioning the making of a precious metal-made, gem-studded statue that acts as both a religious offering as well as a family heirloom, many gold-brocaded *mandalas* (representation of cosmological conception), and costly *puja* (a term borrowed from Hinduism which, in the Hindu-Buddhist cultural amalgam of the Himalayas, just means offering ritual). To fund these sets of Buddhist *sine qua non*, Buddhist households must “ earmark some land or property which would generate enough of money solely to cover these essential expenses.”<sup>6</sup> The argument then is two-fold: first, Sikkimese are already paying “taxes” by virtue of their subscription to Buddhism, their religion of choice and its entailed financial duties; second, levying more financial burden on Sikkimese would only undermine the very foundation of Sikkim, because “just as family is the unit of any nation, the monastic unit here in Sikkim forms the basis of the entire state.”<sup>7</sup>

However, some of the claims in the letter no longer stand when cross-examined against other sources. According to one of my informants in West Sikkim, Sikkimese Buddhists are not required to finance all the extravagant offerings cited by Captain Yongda.<sup>8</sup> Low-income households can construct the “unitary monastery” out of wooden planks, plastic cups and even replace the Buddha statue by a gaudy Xeroxed pictorial representation of him instead. Commissioning sumptuous gold-made offerings is often the endeavor of the wealthy, and is often done at their convenience rather than as a financial burden. Moreover, the claim that “every family was obliged to allot one of its members to become a full-fledged monk” is simply inaccurate. Their Highnesses Namgyal & Dolma’s *History of Sikkim* mentions that the third Chogyal Chagdor Namgyal instituted the religious enlistment of “the middling son in every three sons in a house from amongst the Bhutea (Lhopo<sup>9</sup>) community of subjects”<sup>10</sup> for Pemayangtse monastery only. Otherwise, monasteries like Dubdi would not be forlorn estates where only a handful of monks reside. Besides, not everyone is eligible for Pemayangtse. Historically, only descendants of the twelve Lhopo noble clans *lho rig ru chen chu nyi* (*Tib. lho-rigs-rus-chen-bcu-gnyis*) can be considered for admission. Since there are only 108 (a lucky number in Tibetan religious culture) lama places to compete for, getting into Pemayangtse is quite a feat, and thus hardly qualifies as an onus. The other claim about families reserving lands and properties to finance religious activities again only concerns a select Sikkimese population who did own lands to begin with.

These pretexts in the letter all point to the very particular echelon its author and those “Buddhist households” he has in mind belong to: the aristocratic Lhopo and Lepcha<sup>11</sup> community of Sikkim. This class of Sikkimese would predictably be the most resistant to the introduction of any kind of income tax into Sikkim, having not experienced much financial duty throughout the Chogyal reign. The letter featuring a litany of complaints of the upper class Sikkimese thus eclipses the real hardship born by generations of Sikkim’s landless peasants. With justifications that run a gamut from philosophical vindication (“the radical composition of

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. Refer to Appendix 1.

<sup>8</sup> Karma Dolma Shenga. Interview, Nov 27<sup>th</sup> 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Those who immigrated into Sikkim from Tibet and Bhutan in the thirteenth century, a term considered more precise than the overused designation of “Bhutia.”

<sup>10</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 42.

<sup>11</sup> A people that has settled in Sikkim as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century, considered the “first people.”

this Sikkim state as comprising essentially spiritual people, unlike any other States in India today<sup>12</sup>) to practical grounds (Buddhism in Sikkim “keeps down crime rate”<sup>13</sup>), the letter was an exemplary piece of rhetoric. It almost seduces one into believing in the Shangri-la of Buddhist Sikkim, where people are pious and happy, where taxes are like the famous Buddhist “expedient device,” a necessary evil to gain more karmic merits. However, underneath the percussive Buddhist fanfare of tax-free Sikkim are the low murmurings of a history of subjugation of the landless by the landed.

## TAXATION IN CHOGYAL’S SIKKIM

### The Chogyal governmental organization

Khye-bum-sa (*Tib. Gyad-hBum-bSags*) and his followers the *tong-du-ru-zhi* (“the four regimen of a thousand each”) and the *Beb-tsang-Gyad* (the eight noble Lhopo clans), together constituting the *lho-rig-ru-chen-chu-nyi* or the twelve original Lhopo clans are generally believed to be the first Tibetan immigrants to arrive in Sikkim in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. When Khye-bum-sa arrived in Sikkim, the Native Chiefs of the Lepcha, Thekong Tek and Thekong Salang “received him as the prophesied ruler and lived peaceably under him.”<sup>14</sup> When the three patron lamas<sup>15</sup> of Sikkim convened at Yuksom and consecrated the coronation of the first Chogyal Phuntsog Namgyal, the king selected 12 *kahlons* (ministers) out of the *lho-rig-ru-chen-chu-nyi*, and 12 *jongpons* (head of *jong* or district) out of the Lepcha noble families. The bureaucracy of the state consisted of *chagzot* (prime ministers), *donyer* (dewan), *trungyig* (secretary), *nyerchen* (grand steward), *dingpon* (Chief Officer of fort), *chupon* (chief of a ten-man force). There are various *kazi* (landlords) and other kinds of intermediary officers who served as the local judiciary and revenue-collecting authority.<sup>16</sup>

### Nature of land ownership

In land-scarce mountainous Sikkim, where out of the modest total area of 709600 hectares, only 13.67% are arable land, including current and other fallow land,<sup>17</sup> ownership of productive land has always been a mark of wealth and power. Legally there was a tacit understanding among the people of the kingdom that all lands belonged to the king, and that even royally endowed lands to meritorious subjects of the state, unless stated otherwise, were liable to revocation by the king at his own discretion. For example, in a *sanad* (ordinance of land endowment to a king’s subject as a reward for his or her loyalty of service) from the 5<sup>th</sup> Chogyal Namgyal Phuntso to a Lhopo subject named Namrab for his service, it was stated that “as you

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. Refer to Appendix 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>14</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, Appendix, 1.

<sup>15</sup> They are Lhatsun Namkha Jigmed, Katok Kuntu Zangpo, and Ngadag Sempa Phuntsog Ringzing.

<sup>16</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, Appendix, 1.

<sup>17</sup> J.R. Subba. *History, Culture and Customs of Sikkim*. (Del, India: Gyan Publishing House, 2008), 79.



are a tenant of the lands under our direct hand and seal, we give you our pasture lands temporarily, which however has not been your patrimonial property.”<sup>18</sup>

### The beginning of state revenue collection and state taxation

It was recorded that in 1725, Lepcha Chief Tasso Bidur of Chyakung estate, together with a Magar chief, rebelled to stop revenue of Siliguri district<sup>19</sup>, thus implying revenue collection started even before 1725, if not at state level, then at least on a district basis. However, Namgyal & Dolma (1908) asserts that 1747 is the birth year of Sikkim state taxation. Chogyal Namgyal Phuntsog was born in 1733, whose legitimacy was ignored by *Chagzot* Tamding of Tsechudar<sup>20</sup> family. Thus from 1738 to 1741, Tamding established his reign, self-titled as “Tamding Gyalpo” at Rabdentse, but was finally defeated and fled to Lhasa to seek Tibetan intervention. To settle this, Tibet sent an officer named Rabden Sharpa to make enquiry and report. He went on to rule in Tibet for five years, starting from 1747 as Rabden Sharpa Gyalpo. Rabden Sharpa is commonly credited with introducing taxation for the first time in Sikkim. In order to obtain an accurate population census, the first of its kind, he gave a *bakshi*, a plateful of salt, which was very precious at that time, to every subject who came to pay respect to him, and thus cleverly incentivized all the households to show up. He noted down all the *bakshi* recipients in a roll and based on this roll, carried out the assessment of tax for the following year. Sometime during his reign at a convention called Mangsher Duma, Rabden Sharpa and the eminent minister *Chagzot* Karwang ordered all Sikkimese lamas, laymen, headmen and *raiyats* (commoner) to sign a constitution which defined a fixed system of state revenue such as Bahpa, Zolung (“handle of manufacture,” perhaps specifically taxes on forest produce) and *tshong-skyed*, a trade custom.<sup>21</sup> The first formal population census in Sikkim was conducted much later in 1891 under the British administration.

Since then, the taxes on *raiyats* who lived on the estate directly under the king’s control, collected by their respective headmen and delivered to the Chogyal’s Durbar, are as follows:

+ Well-to-do *raiyat*: one pathi of rice, 1/8 seer of butter, as holiday or *pujah*. This rate was later revised to be 9 pathies of rice and 12 pathies of marwa.

+ Middle-class *raiyat*: 6 pathies of rice and 1 load of marwa.<sup>22</sup>

Every *raiyat* was expected to contribute butter for export, royalty on certain industries, musk, magenta, wax and cardamom. The Chogyal also loaned out salt and tea, expecting repayment of a stipulated amount in due time. If the *raiyats* could not repay at the due date, interests would be levied. Taxes on the *kazis* themselves included a summer and winter tribute, which included a bull, a pig, loads of rice and marwa. Taxes on *jongpons* included frequent “contribution of stores.” Namgyal and Dolma also noted the event in 1718 of Limboos being exasperated by the Chogyal’s constant fortification and thus exploitation of the labor of the former, thus wanting to separate their Limbuana territory from Sikkim,<sup>23</sup> implying the King could exact construction labor out of *raiyats* as well.

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<sup>18</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 65.

<sup>19</sup> I.S. Chemjong, *History and Culture of the Kirat People*. (Kathmandu: Tumeng Hang, 1967)

<sup>20</sup> One of the four *tong-du-ru-zhis*.

<sup>21</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 62.

<sup>22</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, Appendix, 33.

<sup>23</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 54.

## Taxation in Sikkim as a British Protectorate (1817-1947)

The British's Land Resettlement Program supervised by Political Officer J.C. White in 1889 marked a turning point for land ownership in Sikkim. In Their Highnesses' historical account, Sir White with the aid of the *koshag* (the Chogyal's council of twelve Lhopo representatives) carried out land resettlement works without the consent of the Chogyal, who was then detained in Kalimpong.<sup>24</sup> Under the revised regulations, monasteries no longer owned lands stated in past royal deeds of grants, but was only authorized to "receive the gifts and donations of certain villages or blocks, over which they were given religious authority." They also could own lands donated by deceased laymen. As a result, monasteries "did not possess much land."<sup>25</sup> The Chogyal deemed the reform "undesirable" but did not hold the British officers entirely responsible, saying the officers were naturally unaware of "the then prevailing circumstance of the State." He criticized instead the faction of Phodong Lama and Khangsa Dewan brothers who frequently antagonized the Chogyal and the royal lamas. This faction supposedly seized lands which were under the Chogyal's direct control and stewarded by the intermediary officers mentioned in the last section, as well as appropriated the patrimonial lands of many subjects to give to new Newari, Puhari settlers or Lepchas and Lhopos who had no legitimate claims to these lands, but who had bribed Phodong Lama and company.<sup>26</sup> Also in 1889, Sir White conducted a land survey, and then according to the quality of each piece of land, leased them out to interested landowners at various rates. He also levied on every household a capitation tax of Rs. 2 in the name of labor tax and an excise tax for the brewing of grain alcohol of Rs. 2. There were also auctions for the license to weigh and tax cardamom produce. Another source of state revenue during this time was the licensing of liquor shops, hide trade, and timber. He also introduced the grazing tax of Rs. 2 per sheep. Sales taxes were also levied on the then burgeoning scene of private shops.<sup>27</sup> The last of these revisions was in 1915 when C.A Bell (1870-1945), the new Political Officer, introduced the collection of land revenue in cash.<sup>28</sup>

The next period of taxation history saw a gradual erosion of the legal and economic power of landlords in Sikkim. During the last two years of Chogyal Thutob's rule, the 10<sup>th</sup> Chogyal Sikyong Tulku took over, whom during his brief reign of ten months, dedicated himself to bettering the lives of the majority of his subjects, the landless peasants. In 1913, Sikyong Tulku abolished imprisonment as a punitive measure for non-payment of debts and banned the settlement of Nepalese plainsmen. He also proposed to liquidate the system of landlords. In 1916 Chief Court of Sikkim (High Court) was established, bringing judicial functions of landlords under the supervision of a superior court. In 1924, Tashi Namgyal Chogyal limited the judicial power of *mandal* and *karbari* (tax collectors) in order to check their exploitation of farmers. In 1945, government use of *jharlangi*, a form of conscripted labor, was progressively curtailed. In 1946, the Chogyal outlawed landlords' practice of exacting *jharlangi* out of peasants. In 1947, His Highness abolished *kuruwa*, another form of compulsory labor duty and, as the final step in

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<sup>24</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 158.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>27</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, Appendix, 35.

<sup>28</sup> Subba, *History, Culture and Customs*, 2.

these incremental reforms, the Chogyal removed the judicial and magisterial functions of landlords altogether.<sup>29</sup>

### “Surtax”

During this time in Sikkim history, by owning land, one came to own the humans living and cultivating on that land. Almost every *sanad*, besides stating the name of the land gift, also asserts that the gifted entity has “full rights to every plainsmen *raiyat*, who dwells on the land”<sup>30</sup> or “laying claims to any Sikkim subjects” that inhabit the endowed territory.<sup>31</sup> The language of “having full rights to” and “laying claim” implies the recipient of the estate endowment possessed both economic and legal jurisdiction over the *raiyats*. This ambiguity as to the extent of the entitlement and administrative power of the landholders over the *raiyat* might have presented an opportunity for exploitation of the bonded peasants. The language of the *sanads* also suggests the possibility of a multi-tiered overlord system whereby every commoner was a subject to a hierarchy of authorities, from the king to the district officers to the owner of the land they cultivated in, to the intermediary fee collectors. Such a system would facilitate the proliferation of multiple forms of taxation as elaborated in the section below, as authorities at any level could extract money, produce and labor out of their subjects. Most of these taxes have nothing to do with the agricultural output from the land itself, but are merely innovative schemes to exploit the human subjects living on that land.

- a) *Zamindari System*: *zamindar* and *thekadars* (different levels of landlords)<sup>32</sup> employed middlemen to entice people into their controlled territories. These settlers would then have to contribute Rs. 1 per house as a tax to the *amindars*. The *amindars* kept 10 annas (1/16 of a rupee) for themselves and sent the remaining 6 annas to the government as land rent. Additionally, from every house, they collected Rs. 6.75 as a dwelling tax (*dhurikhazana*) which was equivalent to a set of oxen, kept Rs. 5.75 and submitted Rs. 1 to the government. These taxes were then extended to even non-settlers of their lands.<sup>33</sup>
- b) *Jharlangi*: *kazis*, *thekadars*, *mandals* and *karbari* extracted unpaid labor out of their farmers to carry out roadwork on various trade routes. This unpaid labor is called *jharlangi*, in which peasants were at the beck and call of these landlords, carrying out road construction for the British with no compensation, while their landlords would pocket the pay. Sometimes, these landlords also compelled peasants to carry beddings of government officials on transfer for free.<sup>34</sup>
- c) *Kalobhari*: British arms and ammunition traded to Tibet were “wrapped in cardboards and put inside gunny bags bedaubed with tar”, and were called *kalobhari* or “black load.” These weighed about 40 kilograms. On their way back, the bags were filled with gold dust. The British contracted the transportation of *kalobhari* to *kazi-thekadar* contractors,

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<sup>29</sup> Subba, *History, Culture and Customs*, 47.

<sup>30</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 58.

<sup>31</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 61.

<sup>32</sup> A *thekadar* collects revenue from his tenants in his *theka* (revenue contract), an area in a village he is in charge of. The *thekadar* won the *theka* by being the highest bidder and paid a *nazarana* (premium) to the *zamindar* who contracts the *theka* out to him. Allen Abramson, Dimitrios Theodossopoulos. *Land, Law and Environment: Mythical Land, Legal Boundaries*. (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 145.

<sup>33</sup> Subba, *History, Culture and Customs*, 62.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*,

who either kept the full Rs. 2 per labor per day for themselves or only paid the laborers 6 annas.<sup>35</sup>

- d) *Theki-Bethi*: *mandals* and *karbaris* are below *zamindars* and *thekadars* in terms of authority, serving as rent collectors for the latter. As middlemen, they employed *theki-bethi* to wring money out of the people. On festive occasions, peasants had to present *mandals* and *karbaris* with gifts, packed in special receptacles called *theki*. Another kind of “gift” was free labor, called *bethi*.<sup>36</sup>
- e) *Kuruwa*: *Kuruwa* literally means “a long wait.” While waiting to start their *kalobhari* duties and other labor obligations, peasants had to survive on their own resource. This was not a tax by itself, but indirectly increased the burden the peasants of little means.<sup>37</sup>

Landlords could also tax those who fished or collected wild honey on their land, by a tax of baskets of dried smoked fish or seers of wax every half a year.<sup>38</sup>

### *A TAXED LIFE*

*I found missing in Captain Yongda’s grand narrative of the Sikkimese life the browned faces I’ve come to see everyday along the many shortcuts that lash the hills of West Sikkim; faces of those too poor to drive, those whose feet made paths where there was none, those with baskets of gathered cow feeds on their drooped backs that make them look like moving giant leafy monsters. One day in November, I met one such missing face. It sports a toothless smile, and skin like rumpled brown sheets, the legacy of seventy years of backbreaking work. The face belongs to Mr. Sukraj Limboo.*

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>38</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, Appendix, 33.

Figure 2 : Mr Sukraj Limboo in the fief owned by Phetok Mandal



*He has lived in Singyang village, a few kilometers down from Pelling, all his life under the same mandal, named Phetok. During the Chogyal reign, Mr. Sukraj paid an annual tax of Rs. 1 to the Mandal. It was a big sum for the small man. “It was very hard,” he said through rotten teeth. Mr. Sukraj also experienced the seemingly fictional kuruwa (“the long wait” tax). For example, one time he had to pack food and belongings to go to the Chogyal’s palace and tend to the royal horses. It was unpaid for one, he even had to provide sustenance for himself during this period in which he could not cultivate and be productive. It was a double loss.*

*Later I garnered that Phetok Mandal collected the tax on behalf of Pemayangtse monastery. Phetok Mandal himself belonged to one of the twelve Lhopo noble clans and fathered the current Pemayangtse Lama Estate Manager and the current Sanga Cheoling head, after I bid farewell to Mr. Sukraj, the Hindu farmer taxed by a religion not his own.*

## Lamas' land and tax

In one of the concluding paragraphs of the letter to Indian government's Ministry of Finance, Captain Yongda vehemently defends monasteries' need for lay support. "The monasteries themselves have to have enough resources to cover expenditure on buildings, upkeep and maintenance of lamas, their training schools, and religious traditional ceremonies for which purposes they were provided with sufficient lands, properties and the rights of collecting rents, commissions, etc... Apart from these, the monasteries had to conduct daily 'Khang-tso' and Monlam prayers, about 10 large-scale ceremonies every month, and about such 6 annual ceremonies each covering about a week duration at which not only all lamas have to be present but all inhabitants of those monastery who had to be fed and housed."<sup>39</sup> With such inordinate financial onus, he argues, the monasteries of Sikkim have every right to elicit lay contribution, or in other words, to own lands and tax.

In the account of the founding of Sikkim, the three patron lamas chose a layman *chintak* (*Tib. sbyin bdag*) literally meaning "the owner of the donation") to become the Chogyal,<sup>40</sup> laying the foundation for the tradition of State patronage of Buddhism throughout the next three centuries. The priest-patron relationship between the three patron lamas of Sikkim and the king epitomized the flow of karmic merits goes directly the other way from the flow of funds: lay donors accumulate *penam* (*Tib. bsod nams* meaning "dharma merits") by supporting the maintenance of monasteries and their ranks of monks. According to Namgyal & Dolma's history, Chagdor Namgyal, the third Chogyal "enforced an importance upon the 108 *Trapas* (spiritual masters) of *Ta-Tsang* (*Tib. grva gtsang* literally meaning "pure breed"), and appointed 108 families as their chief laymen, for supporting the 108 Lamas, called *garnas*, who bound themselves by oath and on bond to be faithful."<sup>41</sup> Note that these *garnas* were only the chief laymen. There must have been many other subjects under each of these lamas responsible by the dictate of royal authority, and perhaps by their own spiritual commitment, to finance the religious activities of these *Ta-Tsang* lamas. The terminology of "by oath and on bond" introduced a legal dimension to the contract, which starts to take on the appearance of an indenture. As spelled out in Captain Yongda's letter in the introduction, financing the routine Buddhist liturgies conducted by these lamas is no small financial burden. It is also stated in the royal history that "certain villages are named the Laymen of certain monastery; and these people support the monastery with their contributions for *pujahs* in all cases, e.g., merit-acquiring *pujahs* for the living, *pujahs* for cure in case of sick people and funeral ceremony *pujahs* and so on."<sup>42</sup> Moreover, these contracted families might even have to provide free labor for the transportation of the many bulky Buddhist musical instruments, and bedding for the lamas on their various pilgrimages and travels to conduct *puja*. Thus it seems *garna* as an institution guarantees a source of stable support for Pemayangtse. Although there must have been undoubtedly some prestige attached to the designation of *garna*, the binding nature of the relationship and the substantial financial commitment involved in being a *garna* seem like another form of monastic tax. However, Pemayangtse *Lobenla* (monastery's estate manager) Lama Tempa Gyatso and Mr. Ugyen Chopel disputed the existence of this 108 *garnas* system,

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<sup>39</sup> Yongda, 1989: 2. See Appendix 1.

<sup>40</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 27

<sup>41</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 42-43.

<sup>42</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, Appendix, 32.

saying contribution to the monastery has never contracted that way; it has always been on an honored voluntary basis.<sup>43</sup>

The regular income of a monastery is termed *cheoshi* (*Tib.chos gzhi* or “support of the dharma”). Sikkimese monasteries did not own lands in perpetuity directly transferred from the royal authority, unless stated otherwise by the Chogyal, but were instead allowed to collect contributions from settlements named to be their lay supporters. Additionally, transfer of land ownership from lay donors to monasteries is also allowed. A 1901’s edict from a Chogyal states that “they [the lamas of Pemayangtse have been receiving substantial contributions in the shape of lands from the public in general—both in the name of the living and the dead.”<sup>44</sup> Sanga Cheoling monastery has also received such estate donation from the laity. As claimed by the Dorje Lupon, among the only two estates under the name of Sanga Cheoling Monastery in West Sikkim is one small plot in Tikchek village, given to the monastery by a late layman in his will, which a Lhopo and a Chetri farmer are cultivating paddy on a lease. The other plot is in Arithang village, donated to Sanga Cheoling by an heirless laywoman from Sikyong, which a Chetri farmer is also planting paddy on.<sup>45</sup> The lamas and generals of Sikkim could also receive endowment of land from foreign authorities such as Tibet or Bhutan.<sup>46</sup>

### Aside 1: On Sikkimese lamas’ temporal roles

*Sikkimese lamas, also known as Trapas are famous as householders as they are as spiritual masters. Labor-intensive agro-pastoral farming system in Sikkim (due to its terrain Sikkim had to rely on a variety of food production methods)<sup>47</sup> means that most families cannot afford to dedicate their son to full-time monastic service. Thus most monks migrate seamlessly between the temporal and the religious domains, most being non-celibate, having wives and children. Pemayangtse monastery, in particular, belongs to the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism, also known as the “unreformed school,” which advocates being in close contact with the mundane realm in order to truly comprehend the nature of transcendence.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Pemayangtse lamas, due to their close pedigree with the king and their spiritual stature, also held important roles in the government. These lamas’ foray into the politics and administration of Sikkim, a prerogative bestowed by the king, is mentioned in a 1901 royal edict: “Collection of khasana<sup>49</sup> and power to try civil and criminal cases are hereby conferred upon the lamas as before.”<sup>50</sup> The royal lamas of Pemayangtse also had “the privilege of sending a representative to*

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<sup>43</sup> Pemayangtse Lobenla Lama Tempa Gyatso. Interview, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Mr. Ugyen Chopel. Interview. November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

<sup>44</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>45</sup> Sanga Cheoling Dorje Lupon Kungga Tsering Lama. Interview, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Sanga Cheoling Nyima Tsering Lama. Interview, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Sanga Cheoling’s head of lay committee Mr. Kanchu Bhutia. Interview, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

<sup>46</sup> See Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 35, 61, 79 for instances of land endowments by foreign governments to Sikkimese lamas.

<sup>47</sup> Subba, *History, Culture and Customs*, 88.

<sup>48</sup> Melanie Vandelhelsken, “Secularism and the Buddhist Monastery of Pemayangtse in Sikkim,” *Bulletin of Tibetology*. 39.1. (2003): 64.

<sup>49</sup> Collected rents on the king’s private estate.

<sup>50</sup> See appendix 2

*the Maharaja's Durbar, as a member of the Sikkim council,"*<sup>51</sup> *which deliberates on various administrative and diplomatic matters.*

The first recorded land under the charge of Pemayangtse dates back to 1730 A.D. in the Chag-kyi (Iron Dog) year, when the land of Phulbari granted by Chogyal Gyurme Namgyal to a lama "in perpetuity as *jagir* (religious endowment)"<sup>52</sup> was re-granted to Pemayangtse when the lama passed away. In exchange for this permanent property, lamas of the monastery were expected to conduct a ceremony periodically to appease the departed and bless the king.<sup>53</sup> From this point onwards, the monastery began accumulating areas that it was not proprietor of, but is licensed to collect "contributions" on. An example of such a territory is the area bounded by the four rivers Rangit, Rathong, Khalat and Rimbi<sup>54</sup>. The Sikyong Tulku Namgyal Chogyal granted this vast territory to Pemayangtse for the service of one of its senior monk named Chichudar Yap Chiba of Tikchuk who served as His Majesty's personal secretary.<sup>55</sup> The Revenue Collector Mr. Pem Dorji stated that nowadays Pemayangtse owns from 7 to 10 villages all around West Sikkim<sup>56</sup>, while an eminent monk of Pemayangtse Mr. Ugyen Chopel stated 11 blocks (districts or units of rent) belong to Pemayangtse, which the *mandal* collect land taxes, forest produce and trade-related tax, and divided this revenue into two parts, 40% of the amount going to the Monastery, the rest to the State.<sup>57</sup>

The spiritual heads of the monasteries were intimately involved in the administration and the jurisdiction concerning tax collection of their estates (presumably only those donated by lay donors that monasteries were authorized to lease out and tax). Three particular leaders, the "spiritual master" *dorje lupon* (*Tib. rdo rje slob dpon*), the "prior" *buze* (*Tib. dbu mdzed*) and the "discipline master" *cheothimpa* (*Tib. chos 'khrims pa*) formed a council called *udor cheotsum* (*Tib. dbu rdor chos gsum*)<sup>58</sup> The council then appointed a tax collector *mandal*. The monastery's secretary *trungyig* oversaw the administration in these estates.

Lama Nyima Tsering, the Senior Monk and the head steward of Dubdi monastery in Yuksam, the first capital of Sikkim, stated that Dubdi does not have any estate presently.<sup>59</sup> Since it would be hard to imagine the oldest monastery of Sikkim never possessing any *sanad* throughout three centuries of state patronage of Buddhism under the Chogyal, Lama Nyima's statement implies that the state must have revoked monastic lands and reinstated state maintenance in the form of government subsidies program. Indeed, after the abolition of the landlord system by the Chogyal in 1947, except for Pemayangtse estates, which remained under the discretion of the *udor cheotsum* council, all other monastic estates were transferred to the Chogyal's Private Estate Ministry.<sup>60</sup> The Dorje Lupon of Sanga Cheoling Lama Kungga Tsering

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<sup>51</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, Appendix, 32.

<sup>52</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 58.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>54</sup> See Appendix 2

<sup>55</sup> Yagpo Yonga. Interview, November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012.

<sup>56</sup> Mr. Pem Dorji. Interview, November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

<sup>57</sup> Mr. Ugyen Chopel. Interview. November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Pemayangtse Dorje Lupon Dolop Cheowang. Interview, November 16<sup>th</sup> 2012.

<sup>59</sup> Dubdi Monastery Senior Monk Lama Nyima Tsering. Interview, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

<sup>60</sup> Rose, L.E., "Modernizing a traditional administrative system: Sikkim 1890-1973," in *Himalayan Anthropology: the Indo-Tibetan interface*, ed. Fisher J.F. pref. Furer-Haimendorf C.V. (Paris: The Hague, 1978), 221.



confirms government subsidies as the main source of monastic support for the monastery these days. In present times, a committee of lay volunteers in Sanga Cheoling headed by Mr. Kanchu Bhutia of Pelling handles the rents from the estates of the monastery, which apparently all come from the generosity of lay donors like himself, while a group of monks under the directives of the Loben La (estate manager lama) (who is currently Lama Tempa Gyatso) undertakes the task of managing estates and collecting revenue in Pemayangtse.

For Pemayangtse, between 1950 and 1973, Ecclesiastical Affairs Department progressively took over its estates. Until 1980s, the department recompensed the monastery part of the taxes it collected on estates previously owned by the monastery. However, from the 1990s, a group of Pemayangtse lamas lobbied for their right to collect taxes directly and also claim back taxes collected that were not reimbursed in part to Pemayangtse in the intervening decade.<sup>61</sup>

When it comes to taking land disputes to court, Pemayangtse lamas had better time under the Chogyal. A 1901's royal edict demonstrates the Chogyal's protectiveness of his lamas' estate interest. In it, he reminded the public that "the lamas of Pemiongchi [Pemayangtse] were created as Raj-Gurus of Sikkim since the time of Lhatsun Namkha Jigme." Then he went on to arbitrate the dispute, "during the Land settlement of the Earth Mouse year (1888) [most likely the Chogyal is referring to the Land Resettlement Act by Political Officer J.C. White], the area confined within the four streams, viz Rangit, Rathong, Khalat and Rimbi was once granted to them; but the final question of possession remained undecided owing to some misunderstanding. In consideration of repeated representations subsequently made by the Lamas... [the areas] are hereby granted to them in perpetuity together with an annual subsidy of Rs. 400/-." Furthermore, monasteries such as the Pemayangtse are also exempted from paying court fees, revenue stamps etc., as they are under the "Royal Patronage." A dictum from the Chogyal (figure 3) at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century clearly spells out these privileges. Should another entity tries to take over the monastery's lands illegally, the Chief Judge, by order of the Chogyal, has to take actions to recover these assets on behalf of the monasteries.

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<sup>61</sup> Vandenhelsken, "Secularism and Pemayangtse," 69.

Chogyal concerning the inalienable estate rights of monasteries under Royal Patronage.

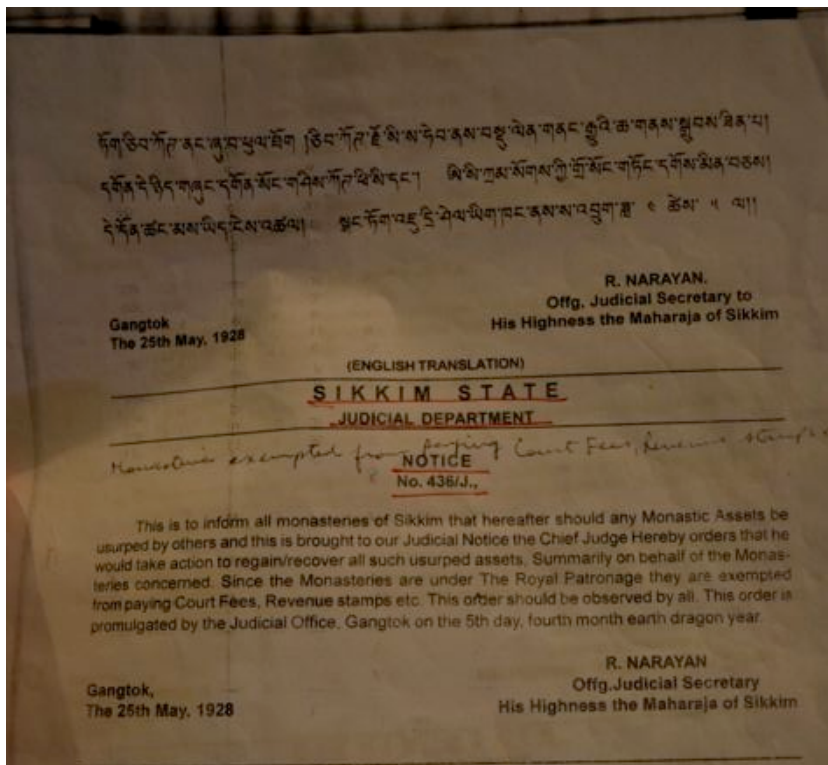
Interestingly, Sikkimese lamas who are often diplomats, strategists, military men of the state, usually earned *sanad* more than just for their religious service. Yet even in these instances, it would still be stated in the *sanad* that the land gift is a religious patronage from the king or *jagir*. An example of this can be found in the royal history account when Raja Namgyal Phuntso, the 5<sup>th</sup> Chogyal,

awarded a *sanad* to the Shari Ngadag Lama, which proceeds as follows: “Whereas Ngadag Sempa Chenpo, by being able to put to flight certain foreigners, had obtained the gift of the lands called Khangkopari, hardighesha, Barmasha and Rajagar, as a perpetual religious maintenance.” Through such language of the *sanad*, the Chogyal might have intended to make a statement that the lamas of Sikkim, despite performing multiple roles for the state and their own home, are first and foremost spiritual teachers of the nation and thus should prioritize religious activities, which the Chogyal would gladly sponsor. Another way to look at such *sanads*, though, is that they are manifestations of the Chogyal’s many efforts to protect the proprietorship interests of his lamas. By the religious nature of their contract, *jagir* are naturally tax-free, and would perhaps be also immune to administrative revisions by foreign authorities out of deference to the culture and religious characteristics of Sikkim. Such protectiveness of the Pemayangtse by the Chogyal more than merely reflects the king-lama spiritual bond, but suggests the undergirding of a certain political alliance.

The other part of the political equation, the other major landowners, apart from private landlords and monasteries, in Sikkim are government officials who directly administered their own estates in some capacity or another.

Property ownership of government officials

*Kazi* (loosely translated as “bureaucratic landlord”) only owned lands “by virtue of deeds of grants from the Maharaja.” Intermediary headmen listed as “Bhutia, Kyomees<sup>62</sup>, Peepons, Nagzans, Chupons and Lepcha Tassa, Gyapon, Chupon” could also enjoy the estates of the king and their superior *kazis*.<sup>63</sup> There were also non-*kazi* Lhapos and Lepchas who owned lands under the direct control of the king, by virtue of royally issued deeds of grants, who were further divided into two types: a) the *nagzans* (which means “private retainer” and was also known *khas raiyat*,<sup>64</sup>) who attended to the palace around the clock, and only had to pay minimal tax. *Nagzan*



<sup>62</sup> perhaps the Bhutia equivalent of *mandal*, the common Sikkimese term for tax collector

<sup>63</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 158.

<sup>64</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 32

were directly appointed by the Chogyal but could also serve certain officers, and b) the *Zimchungpas* who served the Chogyal while he was on tour or traveling or as messengers. These lands were considered “patrimonial lands” in the language of Their Highnesses’ Namgyal & Dolma’s historical account. Land-owning officials, though owning king’s lands, had access to a whole range of economic and legal prerogatives, just like private landlords. Often the Chogyal granted gifts of estates to various officials belonging to various factions, some in alliance with, some in opposition to, the king to diffuse rivalry and strengthen loyalty to the Chogyal reign. It has been argued that, besides providing economic maintenance, the gifting of land “gives the alliance such a physical quality,” thus concretizes the association and cements the allegiance.<sup>65</sup>

It is this lack of separation between the private and the state, where money and power collude that led to the overlordship of the Sikkimese clan-based aristocrats during the Chogyal reign, exploiting not only the *raiya* of Sikkim, but also the every institution of Buddhism and Dharma kingship.

## CLAN POLITICS

### Democracy without the *demo*

*“Demo” means “the people” in Greek. “Demo” in the blessed name of Sikkim, “Beyul Demojong”, means “rice” or “fruits.” Juxtaposing these two definitions randomly, we get a fanciful notion for “demo,” which turns out to be quite apt in talking about the political history of Sikkim, where the promised democracy is without the voice of the “people that grow rice and fruits” for the valley.*

In the letter to Indian tax department, Captain Yongda claims, contrary to other accounts noting the absolute non-representation of Limboos in the top-level government<sup>66</sup>, that from its very founding, the government comprised 36 representatives, 12 from each indigenous people (Lhobo, Lepcha, Limboo).<sup>67</sup> He also asserts that “the whole [government] structure was an intensive democratic set-up,”<sup>68</sup> notwithstanding the fact that the Lhobo delegates had to come from the pure bone pedigree (“the twelve chief Bhutea clans”)<sup>69</sup>, while the Lepcha headmen were no doubt also of noble breeds (“superior families of Lepchas”)<sup>70</sup>. In the Water Sheep Chulug year, the Chogyal selected 24 headmen, 12 *kahlon* (Ministers) out of twelve chief Lhobo clans, 12 Lepcha *jongpon* (Head of *Jongs* ‘district’) from noble Lepcha families. The quotas are equal, but considering the disparate population size of Lepcha and Lhobo, are not *proportional* and thus are not fair. This is not to mention the Limboos who are completely unrepresented in this level of government altogether. Furthermore, the representatives were appointed by upper class, not popularly elected, thus the representation is likely to be unrepresentative.

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<sup>65</sup> Mullard, Saul, “Brag Dkar Pa Family and G.Yang Thang Rdzong: An example of Internal Alliances in Sikkim,” *Bulletin of Tibetology*. 39.2. (2003): 53-68.

<sup>66</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, Appendix 1 “Pedigree of Sikkim Kazis”, pg. 1 and Subba (2008) both list 12 Lhobo representatives to become *kahlons* (*ministers*) and 12 Lepcha representatives to become *jongpons*. There is no mention of Limboo representation in the government throughout the Chogyal reigns.

<sup>67</sup> Yongda, letter to Indian Ministry of Finance.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>69</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 30. The twelve Lhobo clans consist of the four *tong-du-ru-zhis* and the eight *Beb-tsang-Gyad*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*,

Similarly, Pemayangtse monks consider the formation of the administrative and spiritual council of Pemayangtse of *udor cheotsum* “a very democratic process.”<sup>71</sup> Such a process involves the supposed “unanimous” nomination of a lama that is respectable both in his seniority and in his erudition.<sup>72</sup> There might be confusion here in the understanding of democracy by my interviewees. It seems to all the Sikkimese I talked to, democracy just means a political arrangement with equal representation of its constituent populace, regardless of which stratum of the society the representatives are drawn from, instead of a government chosen by the majority of electorates. When ethnic commitment often yielded to clannish allegiance, such a system could hardly be considered egalitarian. In particular, an examination of the pattern of governmental and religious appointment suggests a deep-rooted old boys’ network.

### The Making of Sikkimese Clan-based Aristocracy

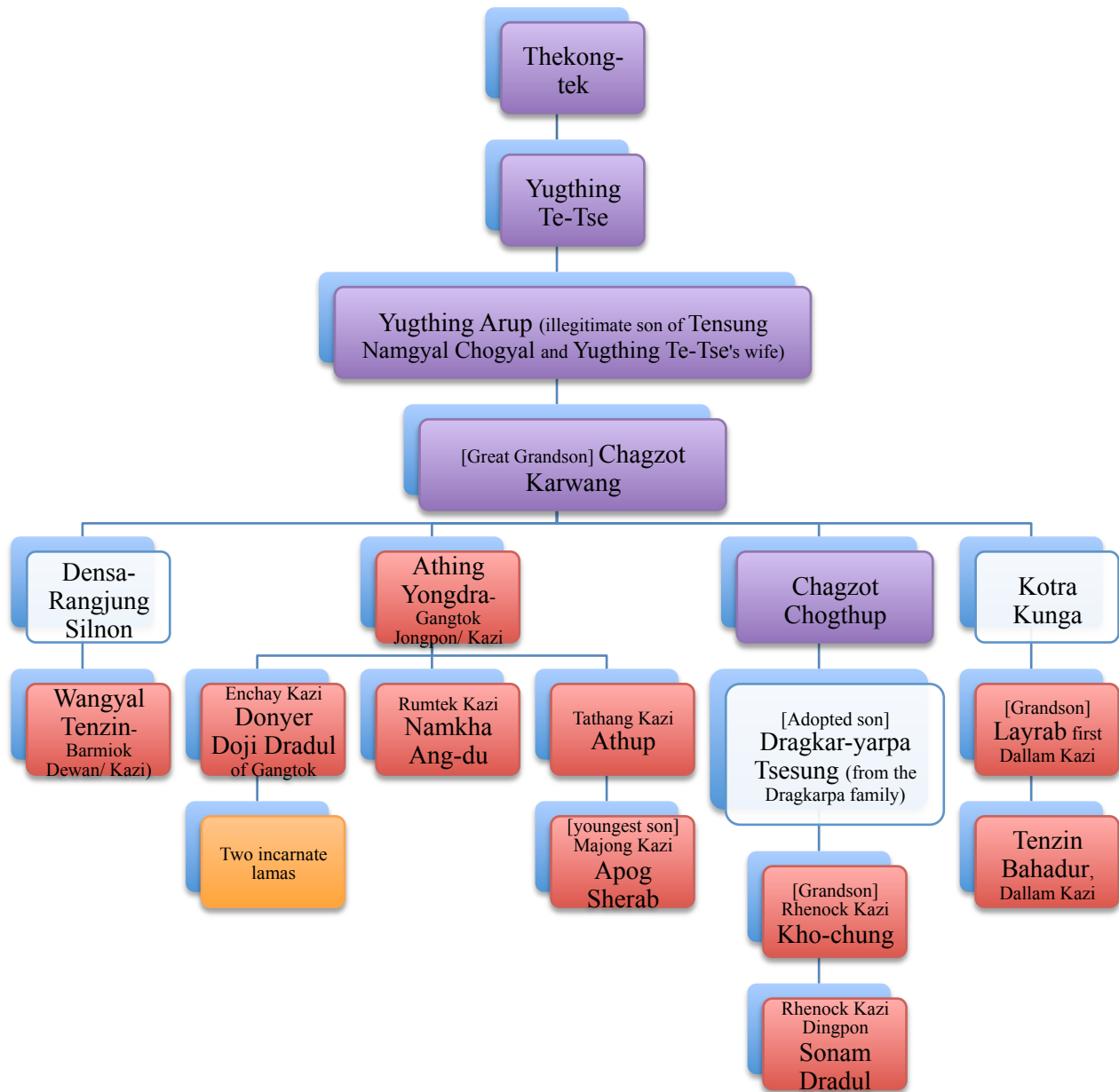
In “Brag Dkar Pa Family and G.Yang Thang Rdzong: An example of Internal Alliances in Sikkim,” author Saul Mullard explicates the notion of alliance as follows: “the formation of a political alliance results from a wide variety of contexts and circumstances, and may be driven, for example, by political necessity and common cultural, physical, emotional or economic bonds.” Below are the pedigrees of some notable clans that in whose hands power and land were concentrated, (note that unless stated otherwise, the vertical lines denote direct father-son relationship), and by analyzing their hereditary, nuptial, economic, political and ethnic identity relationship, we might be able to understand more the Sikkimese alliances that Mullard referred to.

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<sup>71</sup> Mr. Ugyen Chopel. Interview. November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*,

## The Pedigree of Thekong-tek (Lepcha).<sup>73</sup>

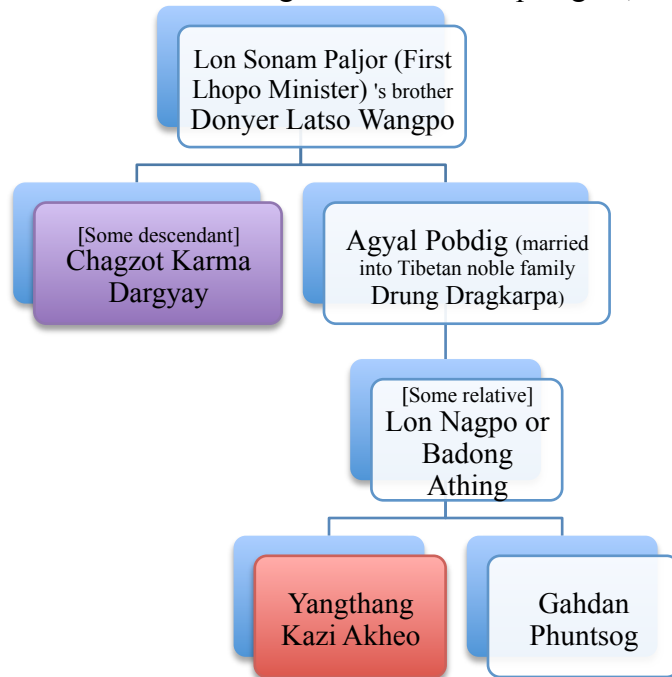


The pedigree started with Thekong Tek, the supreme Lepcha chief at the founding of Sikkim's Chogyal reign. His non-biological grandson Yugthing Arup, the child of the Chogyal and Thekong Tek's daughter-in-law, enjoyed much favor by both the Sikkimese and Bhutanese governments. Yugthing Arup's great-grandson served as the Prime Minister. Another Prime Minister in the pedigree, Chagzot Chogthup was generously rewarded by the Bhutanese government for his loyal service to Bhutan, as follows: "He will get maintenance for himself and

<sup>73</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, Appendix.

16 of his retainers, and the revenue accruing from the Lokhi Piram estates in the plains, which belongs to Bhutan, both the winter and summer collections in cash and in kind; he is further granted the privilege of trading with the plains in winter. Moreover Chogthup is permitted to lay claim to any Sikkim subjects, that may be found in Damsang, Daling, Sanbay and Jongsar.”

<sup>74</sup>Thus in the first ten generations of the pedigree, the Thekong Tek’s family has at least two



Prime Ministers, ten chieftains, two incarnate lamas, one adopted son from the noble Tibetan family of Drung Dragkarpa and vast area of estates, with which a multitude of bonded peasants were associated.

### Lon Dragkar’s pedigree (Lhopo).<sup>75</sup>

The pedigree stemmed from Lon Sonam Paljor, the first Lhopo Minister in the first Chogyal’s rule, and produced one Prime Minister, one *kazi* and one legendary Dragkarpa minister. During the reign of Raja Tenzing Namgyal, the Resident Amban (Imperial Chinese representative in Lhasa), the Imperial Government of China and the Lhasa Government conferred upon the Dragkarpa minister (a male member of the noble Tibetan family

Trung Dragkarpa sent to Sikkim to serve the Chogyal), who had fought bravely against the Bhutanese invaders, an annual allowance of 400 pathis of grains, annual collections of the southern Phari jong. Additionally, the *sanad* also granted him political leadership over a large Sikkimese community, specifically “Bhutea Kalons, Shalngo, Chukhag, Kyomi and the people comprising Bhutea Lepcha and Tsong below Yangang, Rabang Rishi, Singla consisting of Tomyang, Chupon, Tasa and Karthags among Lepchas.”<sup>76</sup> Together with the Yangthang family, the Dragkarpa is of the two most influential families in the history of Sikkim.<sup>77</sup>

**Khangsarpa Phodang Lama’s pedigree (Lepcha).**<sup>78</sup> The Phodang Lama’s family of five brothers managed the Zar estate property, which was originally given to Lhatsun Chenpo, one of the three founding lamas of Sikkim, by the Tibetan 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama as permanent *jagir* (religious maintenance endowment).<sup>79</sup> The pedigree originated in a Lepcha chieftain and is replete with eminent historical figures of Sikkim such as Donyer Chagdor, Labrang Omzet Mahasitta (one of the three heads of a monastery), a state secretary *Trungyig*. Most notably, Phodong Lama Karma Tenkyong and his brother Khangsa Dewan Lhundrub formed the two-man team that is the

<sup>74</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 61.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*,

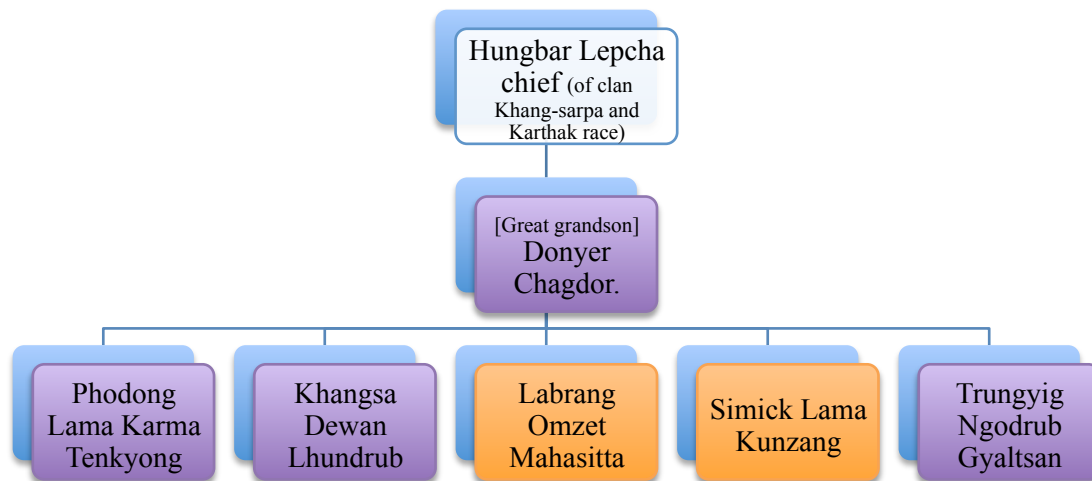
<sup>76</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 79

<sup>77</sup> Mullard, “Brag Dkar Pa Family,” 62.

<sup>78</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, Appendix.

<sup>79</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 35

archenemy of the Chogyal and the Pemayangtse lamas.



Legend:



*Among the illustrious acquaintances I made in Sikkim, Captain Yongda and Mr. Tashi Wangdi who runs the homestay I was in are uncle and nephew of the Shangdarpa clan, one of the four original Lhopo clans tong-du-ru-zhis. Captain Yongda is an in-law to the family of Wangjuk Tobgay, who is a direct descendant of one of the former Dorje Lopons of Pemayangtse that owned most of Yuksam. Another Dorje Lupon of Pemayangtse named Dukjom Dorjee, also known as Khecho Rinpoche, was a “root lama” for the Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal, and was the granduncle of Mr. Pema, a friend of mine in Gangtok. His grandfather Dungzin Rinpoche was also a Dorje Lupon of Pemayangtse, who built the famous “Zangdopalri” or the Guru Rinpoche’s cosmological conception, housed in the top floor of Pemayangtse monastery. The Dorje Lupon of Sanga Cheoling is the brother of the Estate Manager Lama of Pemayangtse, and is himself also a Pemayangtse senior monk. They are both the sons of Phetok Mandal, that Mandal the “owned” Mr. Sukraj Limboo with a toothless smile.*

The intra-clan allegiance is so strong such that one could rely on a nepotistic relative a few degrees of separation apart. The lineage unfolds generation after generation, amassing more power and lands brought into the clans by noble brides and bridegrooms. The ever-multiplying rank of descendants meant that more governmental and religious posts could be captured by the lineage. Since land ownership is hereditary, and so is political and religious appointment it

seems, two possible mechanisms to concentrate land and power within this tight network of noble Lhopos and Lepchas are through marriage and reproduction:

- a) Strategic marriages (or liaisons!): Inter-clan marriages or even marriages with noble of family in countries where Sikkim had a protectorate relationship with as in the case of Dragkarpa family.
- b) Reproduction: The birth of Yuthing Arup essentially married the Chogyal's Lhopo lineage and the Lepcha chieftain's lineage together, creating a potent mix of aristocratic and royal power. Important men of Sikkim with no issue needed not be heirless, for they could adopt illustrious sons from other families and establish the resulting connection. Through this, lamas who wish to remain celibate could also maintain the lineage and accumulate more relations.

The control of land by the aristocrats of Sikkim was effective because the aristocrats held access to every level of authorities that wielded legal and economic power, from the ultimate proprietor that was the king, to the land-endowed lamas, to the tax-collecting *kazi*, to the land-rewarded military men. On the other hand, lands generated money, which fed into the system of bribes, and gifts that lubricated political dealings of all ages. Property feeds on power and power feeds on property. The interplay of power and wealth domination ensures the noble members of Sikkim remain in their ranks as long as the Chogyal reign lasted.

One of the clannish aristocrats closest ally is the royal monastery of "Raj-Gurus" Pemayangtse, which not only provides a moral and religious justification for the social dominance of the former but also important positions in the spiritual wing of the administration of Sikkim.

### "Spiritual democracy"

*Yagpo Yongda sat cross-legged, in full Sikkimese Royal Guard regalia, narrowed his eyes at me. In his emphatic tilting English and a bass resonance that seemed to hold every loose molecule in the room together, he declared, "Before America had democracy, we Sikkimese already had it, you know. Even better, we didn't just have democracy; we had 'spiritual democracy!'"*

In the letter to the Indian Ministry of Finance, Captain Yongda coins the palatable term of "spiritual democracy" to describe Sikkimese political system under the Chogyal, by virtue of the equal representation of the lay (*miday*) and the spiritual (*lhaday*) community in the government. Note that the *miday* is defined to be the secular representative of "followers of the monasteries,"<sup>80</sup> thus the government of Chogyal was rather monolithically an enterprise of Buddhists. It also seems no accident that the only two ethnic representations in the government, happen to also be Buddhist. The 108 lamas of Pemayangtse are not just any lamas: a prerequisite that they must fulfill even before beginning to be considered admission into the order is that both their mother and father must descend from "the 12 major Lhopo clans" *lho-rig-ru-chen-chu-nyi* who directly originated from Khye Bumsa, the mythical first inhabitant of Sikkim, who reputedly came from Tibet in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Lay descendants of Khye Bumsa (offsprings of both a male and female Khye Bumsa descendants) belong to the noble lineage of ru-tsang (*Tib. rus gtsang*) ("bone pedigree"), which falls under the upper strata *ya rig* (*ya rigs*) of the society. Only Pemayangtse lamas and landlords (*kazi*) could own the title of *yab*, which means father, but can also imply

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<sup>80</sup> Yongda, letter to Indian Ministry of Finance.



*yarpa*, a person belonging to the *ya rig*.<sup>81</sup> Why the descendants of a layman are considered more spiritually predisposed and fit is a puzzle, but the fact remains that the selection criteria of the only royal authority that acts as gatekeepers to the royal ascension was unapologetically elitist.

Genealogically speaking, there are supposedly more noble clans than just these twelve. Whatever the actual number of Lhopo clans whose settlement in Sikkim predated the coronation of the first Chogyal, the suspicion remains that these twelve-or-so noble families must have by the 17<sup>th</sup> century exhibited significant economic and political sway (though not religious one) over Sikkim. Nowadays, most Lepchas are Buddhists, but before the coronation of the first Buddhist king in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, even after the 13<sup>th</sup> century immigration of the first Tibetans into Sikkim, the influence of Buddhism in the predominantly animistic Lepcha community was seen as minimal.<sup>82</sup> Thus the Lepchas and their Chieftains must have consented to the terms of Lho-Mon-Tsong-Tsum treaty in 1642, to be subjects to a king not of their own stock, *not* out of religious convictions. If the Lepchas and Limboos then did not venerate the gods and lamas of Buddhism, then the tale of three founding Buddhist lamas must not have been historical cause of the submission of these races of Sikkim. In all likelihood, it must have been the political and economic dominance, which in turn must have predicated on extensive land ownership that converted the Lepcha commoners and nobles to the rule of the Lhopos, and eventually to the foreign faith of Buddhism itself. Another historical condition to consider is the Lepcha's traditional farming system of slash-and-burn, which encouraged nomadism rather settlement, and thus it, might have contributed to their gradual erosion in their proprietorship of their own native land. Hence not only the Buddhists out to be noble, as personified by the rank of Pemayangtse elite monks, but the noble ought to be Buddhist as well, as seen by the historically significant conversion of Lepchas at least four centuries after the first Tibetans arrived in their land, and almost seven ten centuries after Guru Rinpoche decreed Sikkim to be a Buddhist treasure. And thus the *miday* and *lhaday* bled into each other, the two balancing force of administrations that were supposed to be independent from and counterbalancing each other seemed suspiciously melded under the same clout of clan politics and what we have was not a spiritual democracy but an unmistakable aristocracy with the veneer of a religious monarchy.

Yet another question arises. If nobility is the order of the day, why then aren't the Lepcha patricians qualified to join the order of the royal monastery? This question brings in a very important function of the Pemayangtse as an institution. Pemayangtse lamas are *tsa-weh lama* (*Tib. rtsa ba'i bla ma* or "root master"), royally affiliated spiritual guides, whose official endorsement is required for any legitimate ascension to the throne by a crown prince.

<sup>83</sup>Pemayangtse lamas conduct rituals for all the rites of passage of all royal members: coronation, wedding and funeral ceremonies. By holding such an, albeit more symbolic than political, important role in the royal politics, these noble monks were predictably selected from the pool of the king's close kin. Here pan-noble solidarity gave out to inter-ethnic self-preservation, and thus even when the Lepchas number among the most influential government officials, they could never approach the throne, the ultimate dictatorial authority. One could argue the existence of such a system highlights the supremacy of the Chogyal. However, this author tends to see the Chogyal figure much less an autocrat than a frontman for the powerful Lhopo aristocratic bloc behind him. The reason for this is the historical rarity of power struggle surrounding the throne. Except for the only period of usurpation from 1738 to 1741, when *Chagzot* Taming of

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<sup>81</sup> Vandenhelsken, "Secularism and Pemayangtse, 61.

<sup>82</sup> Subba, *History, Culture and Customs*.

<sup>83</sup> One such lama is Dukjom Dorjee, also known as Khecho Rinpoche of Pemayangtse. Mr. Pema. Interview, Nov 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

Tsechudar<sup>84</sup> dismissed the kingly legitimacy of the young king Chogyal Namgyal Phuntsog and established his reign, self-titled as “Tamding Gyalpo” at Rabdentse, the Chogyal reign proceeded in an orderly primogenital manner. This lack of political intrigues surrounding the throne itself implies that the position of the king only holds utmost symbolic importance, especially for the ethnicity of Lhopo, but does not hold much decision-making power. It seems that as long as the king is someone from the royal lineage, it does not matter who he is exactly, since there seemed to be no power struggle among each Chogyal’s multiple sons themselves. The real power seems to rest in the colossal bloc of Sikkimese aristocrats standing behind the king. The second reason for suggesting that the king may not be the chief architect of the exploitation of the lower classes in Sikkim is the evidence of an edict issued by Sikyong Tulku Namgyal in 1901, exhorting the Pemayangtse lamas to only “issue reasonable orders upon the *ryots [raiyat]*,” and dictating that “there shall be no oppression of the *ryot [raiyat]*” and warning those “found acting contrary to this order will be punished severely.”<sup>85</sup> He and Tashi Namgyal Chogyal, in particular, were instrumental in abolishing the institution of seigniorship. Thus the Pemayangtse discriminatory admission is less of an institutional safeguard against dethronement of the particular person of the king and more of an attestation to the potency of Sikkimese clan-based politics that held the figure of the king hostage.

### Aside 2: Reimagining the functions of Pemayangtse the royal monastery.

*Besides the evident political importance Pemayangtse holds in conducting rites of passage for the royalty as well as fending off threats to the throne of the Lhopo king, Pemayangtse could be seen to hold other temporal importance such as military and scholastic training.*

*Captain Yongda was one of the first few monks who received religious instructions in Pemayangtse as well as a general education in a government school. He claimed that there was simply no question of general education in the past not only for the monks, but also just any Sikkimese subject in particular.<sup>86</sup> One could infer from this that Pemayangtse must have numbered among the most prominent educational institutions in Sikkim in times past when Dharma teaching was the only form of education. Thus another way to look at the twelve noble Lhopo clan *lho-rig-ru-chen-chu-nyi* rule of admission is simply that of an elite academy, founded and funded by the Lhopo aristocrats of Sikkim for their Lhopo children only*

*Captain Yongda also commented once, his words coming unwittingly ironically from the only man in Sikkim to receive a medal from the Indian Military Academy, “We monks have no business in the army.”<sup>87</sup> Yet in various historical accounts of Sikkim, there is no dearth of reported incidences where the monks of Pemayangtse took matters (and arms) into their own hands. According to a historical account by a Limboo historian, corroborated only by few other historical works, Teyongshi Sirijunga, “a learned Limboo man of Yangwarok district of North Limbuwan”, who revived Kirat literature and taught Yuma Mundhum to Kirat People of Limbuwan and other regions in West Sikkim, was purportedly “put him under arrest, bounded him to a tree and shot him to death” by Ta-Tsang lamas of Pemayangtse.<sup>88</sup> The killing of*

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<sup>84</sup> One of the four *tong-du-ru-zhis*.

<sup>85</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>86</sup> Yagpo Yongda. Interview, November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>88</sup> Subba, *History, Culture and Customs*, 150 and Chemjong, I.S., *History and Culture of the Kirat People*. (Kathmandu: Tumeng Hang, 1967).

*Sirijunga, the physical persecution of his disciples as well as the ban on the learning and teaching of Limboo script and the indigenous belief of Yumaism triggered war by Lepcha and Limboo against then ruler Tamding Gyalpo Bhutia, who then fled to Tibet. The Limboo community in Sikkim still does puja yearly for their ill-fated leader, though the question of the identity of the assassinator remains hushed.<sup>89</sup> The Limboo leader Sirijunga presented a threat not only to the religious monopoly of Buddhism and Pemayangtse but also a competing leader figure for Sikkim in opposition to the Chogyal. Their Highnesses Thubtop Namgyal and Yeshay Dolma themselves reported in response to the Land Resettlement Act, the Pemayangtse Lamas, in the name of the indigenous Sikkimese and “in the interest of the state,” assassinated an official of Nepali origin in 1880 in their historical account.<sup>90</sup> The Pemayangtse response in these cases could be described as akin to that of a national army. Although Captain Yongda asserted that Sikkim had no standing army,<sup>91</sup> it seemed that the rank of Pemayangtse lamas (numbering in total a lot more than the auspicious number 108<sup>92</sup>) were the king’s army after all.*

*. Though on balance, this is a less important reason that the ones discussed in the previous section, still it would enhance our understanding of Pemayangtse’s institutional behaviors to consider this facet of Pemayangtse’s temporal function,*

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*Such went the history of Sikkim, as the twin institutions of royalty and monasticism yoked together by the potent complex of clan-based aristocracy was a unified bloc, until the influx of ethnic Nepalis posed a threat to the clans’ monopoly of power and money, when the seismic demographic changes revealed the ethnic fault lines of disenfranchised Limboos and dissenting aristocratic factions lurking underneath the blessed land of Sikkim.*

## THE NEPALI RESETTLEMENT—EXTERNAL STRESS BETRAYING INTERNAL WEAKNESSES.

“The Lhopos are said to have enjoyed the post of Jongpon, Magpon, Dingpon, Chupon, Kyomee, Peepon.

The Lepchas are said to have enjoyed the ranks of Jongpon, Magpon, Dingpon, Chupon, Tassa, Peepon.

The Limboos are said to have been appointed Subah, Dingpon, Chupon.”

Namgyal & Dolma’s *History of Sikkim* (1908).<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Mr. Lhendup Tsering. Interview, Nov 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

<sup>90</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 120.

<sup>91</sup> Yagpo Yongda. Interview, Nov 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012.

<sup>92</sup> Mr. Ugyen Chopel. Interview, Nov 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

<sup>93</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, Appendix: 31.

In 1889, John Cloude White, the figure behind the Land Resettlement Act at the end of nineteenth century, became the Assistant Political Officer of Sikkim. From 1890 to 1908, White encouraged Nepali settlement, which already started since the year of 1871,<sup>94</sup> to enlarge tax base and boost agricultural production.

### Aside 3: Buddhism in the Discourse of Land Politics

*The state patronage of Buddhism and the prevalent discourse of the Buddhist lama Guru Rinpoche being the state guardian might have reinforced this sense of self-identification of the Lhopos as the entitled owner of Sikkim. Not only did the Lhopo rely on their Buddhist identity to bolster their sense of confidence in the legitimacy of their guardianship of Sikkim, they also employed religious language to portray the newcomers as sacrilegious, wreaking havoc just by their unholy presence in a sacred land. In a memorial in 1876 to the British Lieutenant Governor Sir. Ashley Eden, a group of spiritual and temporal leaders cited supernatural disasters to justify their objection against Nepalese settlement: “The Gurkhas and the Bhutanese having been inimical to the Sikkim State ever since the time of many previous generations, with whom there existed a blood feud, their being allowed to settle in Sikkim, is a thing which is offensive even to the local deities and family gods and tutelary deities. The immediate result of such undesirable proximity and admixture shows itself in the continued failure of crops amongst the agricultural classes, and the death of the most eminent persons from the higher classes...Such are the inauspicious events brought in by the advent of the inroad of these inimical Gurkha settlers.”<sup>95</sup> Their Highnesses’ history also refers to the new settlers of Puhari and Gurkhas as mainly “demonolators” bon Muteg-sha-za-nagpo or “Bon Heretics of the Black Flesh Eating Creed”).<sup>96</sup>*

*The word for Buddhist in Tibetan “nangpa” which literally means “person from the inside.” I wonder how much this exclusivist undertone to this Buddhist enterprise nuanced the intense awareness of ethnic otherness in Sikkim.*

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“In order to understand alliances, we have to understand the contexts which have helped to shape and develop them. However, one constantly has to be aware that changes in these contexts necessitate a change or re-formulation of the nature of the alliance, as by definition an alliance is not a permanent thing. Associations of this nature shift and adapt according to changes taking place within a wide variety of social contexts, such as far-reaching political, religious or economic transformations or a change in the focus of individuals or groups.”

Saul Mullard, “Brag Dkar Pa Family,” 53.

The Nepali resettlement issue fostered an imaginary alliance, an illusory bond between the Lhopo and Lepcha and the Limboo that had hitherto been excluded on many issues of national interest, at the same time ruptured the internal alliance of the noble Lhop and Lepcha families of Sikkim.

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<sup>94</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, Appendix, 34.

<sup>95</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 112.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, Appendix, 18.

## The Ethnic Dimension of the Dispute.

In the year of 1642, the year of Water Horse in Tibetan calendar, a tripartite treaty of *Lho-Men-Tsong-Sum*<sup>97</sup> at Denzong Phuntso Khangsar, Lepchas and Tsong (Limboo) chieftains agreed to merge their lands with Lhopo migrants to form a united kingdom<sup>98</sup>, effectively establishing the three peoples as the native peoples of Sikkim. Thus under the king, the next level of inherent owners of the land of Sikkim are the Lhopo, Lepcha and Limboo, but more accurately the Sikkimese aristocrats (who are mostly Lhopo and some Lepcha landlords) who actually had lands under their name. The lower-class Lhopos and Lepchas, though not possessing lands, are on some philosophical level, legitimate holders of the land of Sikkim. Therefore in uniting against the Nepali “outsiders,” the landowners of Sikkim are clubbed with their tenant farmers in the clannish discourse. Even Limboo, “the outsider-insider,” now took part in the rank of Sikkim legitimate owners. Limboos, who are neither represented in the government, nor present in the tale of the mythical sworn brotherhood between Lepcha and Lhopo<sup>99</sup>, whose language and Yuma religion was actively suppressed for a large part of the Chogyal reign<sup>100</sup>, and who were grouped together with the Nepali immigrants in a discriminatory diarchic tax system during White’s administration<sup>101</sup>, are now one with the aristocratic Lhopo and Lepcha in the imagined community of authentic Sikkimese who have inalienable rights to the land.

Here the concept of autochthony, the inherent ownership of a place by a people, is worth investigating. Most Lhopos view themselves as unambiguously the rightful inheritors of the hidden paradise of “*beyul demojong*,” even while believing at the same time that their very first ancestor came to Sikkim in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, almost six centuries after the earliest record of Lepcha settling in Sikkim. Before the rule of the Chogyals who are ethnically Lhopo, a series of Lepcha *Panu* (warlords) and Limboo kings<sup>102</sup> starting from around the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century with Thekong Adek ruled their separate localities of their respective ethnicity that now make up the Sikkim State. The definition for “aboriginal” by the New Oxford American Dictionary is “occurring from the earliest times or from before the arrival of the colonialists.” By this definition, it could be argued, not without controversy, that the Lhopos were the first colonialists of the land of Sikkim, with a system of political, cultural, and religious colonization of the indigenous Lepcha, and some would argue, Limboos and other tribes such as Magars who refused to sign the Lho-Mon-Tsong-Tsum treaty.

## The Polarization of the Aristocrats.

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<sup>97</sup> *Lho* refers to Lhopo, *Men* to Menpa or Lepcha, *Tsong* to Limboo. *Tsum* means three.

<sup>98</sup> Called *Renjong* by Lepchas, *Yioksom* by Limboos, and *Deyjong* by Lhopos. Limbooni Queen of Tensung Namgyal, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chos rgyal, named the area *Song Khim*, meaning “new home” in Limboo dialect, which morphed into *Sukhim* and now became *Sikkim*. Subba, *History, Culture and Customs*, 2008.

<sup>99</sup> The year of 1275 saw the blood sworn brotherhood between Thekong Tek, one of the aboriginal Lepcha eminent men, and Khye-Bumsa, purportedly the first immigrant from Tibet to Sikkim in 13<sup>th</sup> century, the forefather of the Lhopo.

<sup>100</sup> Subba, *History, Culture and Customs*, 150.

<sup>101</sup> Subba, *History, Culture and Customs*, 64.

<sup>102</sup> Despite the *Lho-Mon-Tsong-Tsum* treaty, there is still a debate over whether Limboos were indigenous to the land of Sikkim before the arrival of Lhopos. It is commonly assumed that Limboos (Gurkha name) or Tsong (Tibetan name) came with one of Sikkim founding lamas Katog Lama from Tsang Tibet and settled with him in Sikkim.

As apparent as the internal ethnic tension in the land dispute, most skirmishes between during this time did not happen on the ground, but surrounded the adversarial politics between the king and the Pemayangtse lama on one hand, and the Phodong Lama and company on the other. It started in 1879 when the internal anti-Chogyal faction of Phodong Lama and Khangsa Dewan brothers, despite orders from the king and the anti-settlement Lieutenant Governor Sir Ashley, “filled the Rhenock land with Paharias [Nepalese] settlers, allowing them to take lands belonging to Bhutias and Lepchas.”<sup>103</sup> In response, the Pemayangtse lamas dispatched a group of monks to drive the Paharia settlers out, but later in a letter to a *Ta-Tsang* lama, the Maharaja stated that the intention of the Pemayangtse team was to assassinate a leader of the Paharias, a Newari trader Chandrabir Taksasri.<sup>104</sup> Admittedly, the anti-Nepalese sentiment was probably as popular as it was an elitist sentiment. Among the locals (besides the slash-and-burn agriculturalists) there was a concern of environmental degradation due to the new settlers’ alarming rate of clearing forests for cultivation and the rampancy of farming animals that they brought with them. Granted also that Phodong Lama and the British officer unfairly transferred lands owned by the Lepchas and Lhopos to Nepalis, causing distress among many non-noble but land-owning Lhopos and Lepchas.<sup>105</sup> However, the one with the greatest stake in this turn of history was the Sikkimese patrician. There were those who perceived the Nepalese presence as a threat to their political and economic dominance, who sided with the King and the Pemayangtse lamas, while others saw the resettlement of the newcomers as a profiteering opportunity, under the leadership by the Phodong Lama clan, by re-assigning lands to the agriculturally competent Nepalis, earning not only bribes but also bigger harvests. The previously united aristocratic alliance thus polarized, proving again for the most part of Sikkimese monarchic historical development, the movers and shakers are the landed high-born heirs of Guru Rinpoche’s blessed lands.

## CONCLUSION

*May be it is the fact that most of my informants were born and bred in West Sikkim, the land under the hegemony of Pemayangtse, the land which prides itself on being the birthplace of the kingdom. May be it is the fact that most of them are well-to-do Lhopos who might even have some noble blood in there. May be it is the nostalgia for the grand life under the Chogyal, the growing resentment of being a minority in their former turf felt by the upper-class Lhopos and Lepchas. May be it the fact that most Sikkimese still don’t identify as Indians and are increasingly agitated by the recent inflow of out-of-state Indians into Sikkim. Sikkimese I’ve talked to seem to long for a distant past under the benevolent rule of their Dharma King. They seem to prefer subjugation by their own kind than by “the foreigners”, although the distinction between the “insiders” and “outsiders,” as seen in the analysis above historically dubious and often a product of clannish and nationalistic imagination. They don’t trust “the Indians” to act in their interest, when Sikkim exercised its own democracy long before all these Indians started to brag about theirs. In fact, there is nothing further from democracy than the old Sikkimese arrangement, the mix of monarchy, aristocracy and theocracy, whereby the royal, the noble and the holy often are one and the same, through the sanctifying flow of blood and money, the legitimizing transmission of bone and land. Of one’s own.*

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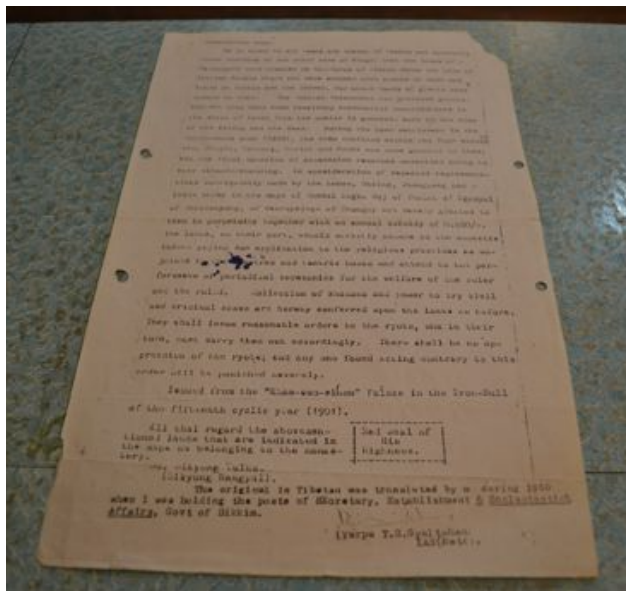
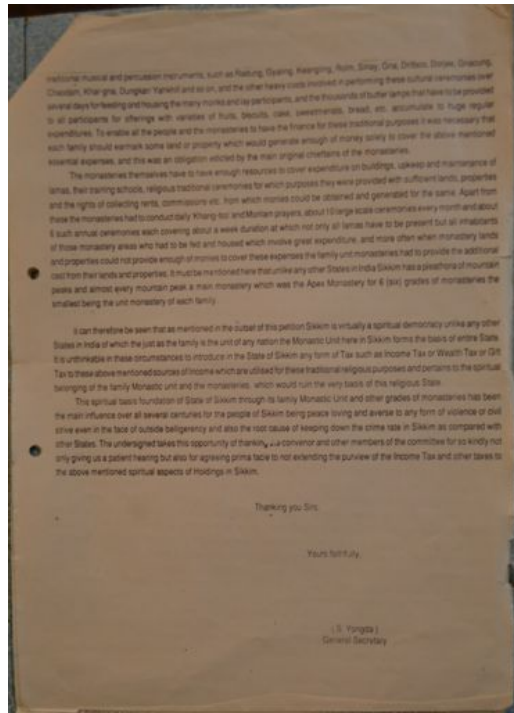
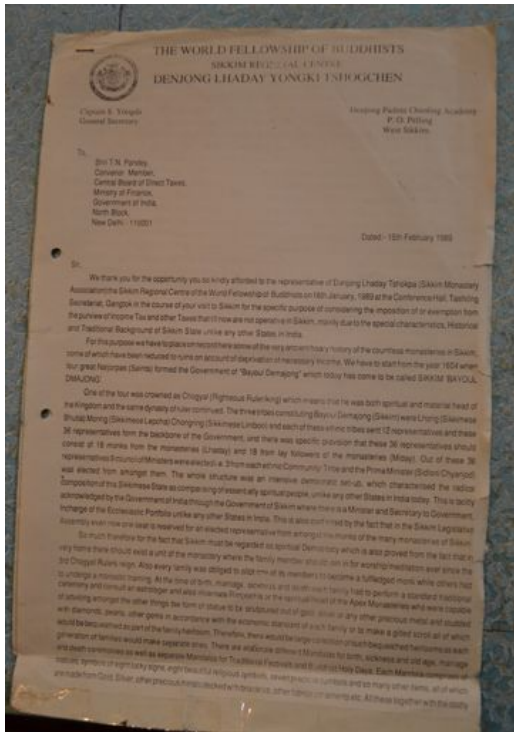
<sup>103</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, *History of Sikkim*, 120

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*,

<sup>105</sup> Namgyal & Dolma, 1908: 158.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1: Captain Yongda's letter to Shri. T.N. Pandey. Property of Captain Yongda.



## APPENDIX 2:

Sir Sikyong Namgyal Tulku Chos rgyal (the 10th Chos rgyal)'s document regarding Pemayangtse's lands, based on the English translator's copy of the original (left) and the Affidavit by the translator, confirming the fidelity of translation (right). Property of Captain Yongda.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

*Beb-tsang-Gyad*: eight noble Lhopo clans, part of the twelve original noble Lhopo clans.

*Chagzot*: Prime Minister

*Ding-pon*: Chief Officer during Chos rgyal reign

*Dorje Lupon*: ritual master, typically the highest figure of monasteries

*Donyer*: Dewan during Chos rgyal reign

*Dzong*: the administrative unit of district during Chos rgyal reign

*Jong-pon*: District Commissioner appointed by the Central Government to administer taxation, as one of the duties.

*Kahlon*: Ministers

*Kazi*: landlords with administrative and jurisdictional power.

*Khye Bumsa* : the first Tibetan settler in Sikkim in 13<sup>th</sup> century.

*Koshag*: Council during Chos rgyal reign

*Lho-rig-ru-chen-chu-nyi*: the twelve major Lhopo clans, who are the original followers of Khye Bumsa from Kham, present in Sikkim before the Chos rgyal reign, members of which are eligible to enter the royal monastery of Pemayangtse

*Nyer-chen*: Councillor during Chos rgyal reign

*Raiyat*: commoner during Chos rgyal reign

*Sanad*: ordinance of land endowment to a king's subject as a reward for his or her loyalty of service.

*Tong-du-ru-zhis*: the original four Lhopo lineages that were direct followers of *Khye Bumsa*.

*Trung-yik*: Secretarial Post during Chos rgyal reign

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Karma Dolma Shenga. Interview, Nov 27<sup>th</sup> 2012.

Sanga Cheoling Dorje Lopon Kungga Tsering Lama. Interview, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

Mr. Lhendup Tsering. Interview, Nov 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

Sanga Cheoling Nyima Tsering Lama. Interview, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

Dubdi Monastery Senior Monk Lama Nyima Tsering. Interview, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012.  
Mr. Pem Dori. Interview, November 27<sup>th</sup> 2012.

Mr. Pema. Interview, Nov 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

Pemayangtse Lobenla Lama Tempa Gyatso. Interview, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

Mr. Ugyen Chopel. Interview. November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

Yagpo Yonga. Interview, November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012.

All figures and diagrams are the original production by this author.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

My project advisor Dr. Saul Mullard, at the time of the writing of this project, is doing some groundbreaking work on state as well as private taxation in Sikkim, based on primary sources in Tibetan scripts. You should definitely contact him at [saulmullard@gmail.com](mailto:saulmullard@gmail.com) if you’re interested in the topic. Especially if you are interested in the diplomatics of land, which I alluded to briefly but did not go into details, you should definitely read Dr. Mullard’s paper titled ““Brag Dkar Pa Family and G.Yang Thang Rdzong: An example of Internal Alliances in Sikkim” in the Bulletin of Tibetology journal (39.2, 2003).

If you are interested in the legal aspect of the topic, definitely log on to the official website of Sikkim state government or “Digital Himalaya” for several documents detailing estate regulations and taxation under the Chos rgyal in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For instance:

[http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/rarebooks/downloads/Sikkim\\_Code\\_Volume1.pdf](http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/rarebooks/downloads/Sikkim_Code_Volume1.pdf)

[http://www.sikkim.gov.in/MISC/GOVERNMENT/Old%20Laws/laws/sikkimcode\\_vol2.pdf](http://www.sikkim.gov.in/MISC/GOVERNMENT/Old%20Laws/laws/sikkimcode_vol2.pdf)

[http://www.sikkim.gov.in/MISC/GOVERNMENT/Old%20Laws/laws/sikkimcode\\_vol4.pdf](http://www.sikkim.gov.in/MISC/GOVERNMENT/Old%20Laws/laws/sikkimcode_vol4.pdf)

[http://www.sikkim.gov.in/MISC/GOVERNMENT/Old%20Laws/laws/sikkimcode\\_vol5.pdf](http://www.sikkim.gov.in/MISC/GOVERNMENT/Old%20Laws/laws/sikkimcode_vol5.pdf)

For contacts in West Sikkim, you could contact my host family, the head of which is Mr. Tashi Wangdi Bhutia (HP no: 9609833528), a principal of a government secondary school, and a cousin of Captain Yongda (9733018062), and has connections to a lot of people in the area. Another person to contact is Mr. Ugyen Chopel (9933114411), the owner of Chumbi Residency in Pelling, a film director and is part of a family with many business contacts throughout West Sikkim. But definitely talk to Captain Yongda. He's a very interesting man.

I didn't have time and chance to interview many commoners. It was hard to find Sikkimese elderly with clear recollections of times past, plus I do not speak Nepali or any other local dialect. If you are interested in the topic, it would be a great advantage to speak Nepali or read Tibetan. I highly suggest getting the perspective of the common people and weigh that against what you read in the royal records and the opinion of these privileged lamas.

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