

7 In the Aftermaths of the War

Nepal did not protest being labelled a tributary state by China, even though it involved an asymmetrical exchange of presents, obligatory kowtow, and occasionally humiliating treatment. The benefit for Nepal was that it could maintain beneficial trade with Lhasa and China, the missions received considerable wealth,⁴⁹¹ and the sale of opium proved advantageous. During the missions, large quantities of opium, valued at 300,000 Rs in the 1852 mission and 450,000 Rs in the 1866–1869 mission, were sent with many porters to carry the loads. The profits primarily benefited the Rana clan, despite some of the opium being unsaleable due to its potency, resulting in its return to Lhasa by the Nepalese mission. This business, though technically based on the Betravati agreement, amounted to the misuse of diplomatic missions for the personal gain of the Ranas, especially Janga Bahadur Rana. It was one of the reasons for the unfriendly treatment experienced by Jagatsera (see 7.2 below).

7.1 Nepalese Missions to China

According to Chinese records, already from the eighth century onwards, Nepalese missions used to visit China with presents for the Emperor. Between 1384 and 1427 five Chinese and seven Nepalese missions

491 It seems that it was profitable for the Gorkhalis to send missions to Beijing. Yang Kui noted that originally, the Gorkhalis proposed a triennial envoy: “The sincerity is doubtless. Be it like the fierce autumn or the mild spring, it is upon the imperial sacred compassion. It was the fortune of the remote and desolated [state] to request for internal affiliation. Every five years, they should not be late for the temporary place reserved for the vassals to rest.” [Autocommentary]: “Gorkha proposed a triennial mission in the beginning, while the Great General [Fuk’anggan] ordered them to pay a quinquennial mission owing to the remote distance so as to show the good intention to appease the distant [people].” 推心置腹更何疑，秋肅春溫總聖慈，幸列要荒求內屬，爰間休後五年期。廓爾喀先請三年一備聯貢，大將軍以其道遠，令五年一貢、用示柔遠之意 (Wu 1985, 169).

were exchanged between the Chinese courts and Malla courts.⁴⁹² In 1732, the three Malla kings of the Kathmandu Valley sent letters “written in golden characters”⁴⁹³ deliberately offering “native products, in token of tribute”⁴⁹⁴ to the Emperor of China, who, however, referred it back to the local officials in Tibet. In 1734, after having been proclaimed by China as a tributary state, they sent the tribute, which contained clothes, coral, amber, rhinoceros’ horn, incense, herbs, and a statue of a Bodhisattva from Patan.⁴⁹⁵

This was the first of so-called tribute payment. Several were to follow, because between 1792 and until 1906–1908, Nepal was obliged to send quinquennial missions.⁴⁹⁶ This was arranged in the understanding at Betravati (see the previous chapter). In the following century, altogether eighteen such missions went to China, between 1792 and 1852 quite regularly, afterwards only five missions followed.⁴⁹⁷

For the Qing Empire, unlike Korea, Vietnam, and Ryukyu within the Sinitic sphere and the Mongols within the Manchu-Mongol sphere, vassals from afar, such as Afghanistan, etc., operated by *Lifanyuan* were freer to a certain extent. In the case of Nepal, the tributary mission might not even need to reach Peking or Jehol but to offer their tribute in Lhasa or Chengdu.⁴⁹⁸ The Emperor even stated that a decennial mission would be acceptable (Part II, 2.2.3d).

However, not many sons of the better families in the Kathmandu Valley were keen on going on these missions, even though it was lucrative. The more than 3000 miles long journeys were dangerous and normally last about one and a half to two years;⁴⁹⁹ the 1877 mission took five, and the 1894 mission seven years. Brian H. Hodgson, the British Resident minister in Nepal between 1829 and 1843, reports from two

492 Rose 1971, 11–12; Petch 1984, 213–23. *History of Ming*, vol. 311, Biography 19, no. 3, 16.

493 *YZ Veritable Records*, vol. 122; Wei Yuan in Landon 1926, 275. The letters can be found in WZTZ, vol. 15, 11–12; WZTZ 1982, 38–39, 511–13.

494 *Ibid.*

495 Slusser 1982, vol. 1, 72; Boulnois and Chen 1972; Manandhar 2004, vol. 1, 68–69.

496 Cp. Vajrācārya and Nepāla 1970; Manandhar and Mishra 1986; Manandhar 2001.

497 Manandhar and Mishra 1986, 19–20; Petch 1996; Liu 2014.

498 *YZ Veritable Records*, vol. 122.

499 For a detailed report on the route to Lhasa, see Montgomerie and Pundit [Nain Singh] 1868. N.B., Since the anonymous ‘pundit’ was one of the explorers and spies trained by the British, his name has not been mentioned in the publication; cp. Smyth 1882.

official summaries of missions that were given to him by King Rajendra Bahadur Shah in 1843 and present an obviously subjective impression of the hardships the *kājī* and his delegation had to face: the unceasing riding on ponies

through a country lamentably deficient in food, fuel, and water, by pretty long stages [...] over a very rough country, for some one thousand seven hundred miles, and then only exchange his pony for the still worse conveyance of a Chinese carriage (more properly cart), [...] fatigue and bad weather notwithstanding, and the high-caste Hindu's cuisine (*horresco referens*) all the while entirely in the hands of filthy Bhotias and as filthy Chinese!"⁵⁰⁰ All this happened "under the orders of a seemingly insouciant and really pragmatistical China-man, who answers all objections with "Orders of the Emperor," "Food of the country", "You nicer than us, forsooth", "Fed or unfed, you start at such an hour".⁵⁰¹

Quite often members of the delegation and porters lost their lives, in three cases even the leaders died. There were many hindrances by Tibetan and Chinese officials but also through robbers and thieves as well as by the rough terrain and bad weather. According to the itinerary published by Hodgson,⁵⁰² the missions had to cross between up to 652 rivers with 607 bridges and 23 ferries. Occasionally, they were stopped on the suspicion that they were smuggling or committing espionage although, on diplomatic grounds, they were allowed to trade and did not have to pay any taxes.⁵⁰³ With Janga Bahadur Rana opium became one of the most important commodities.

The delegations were normally received with great pomp. The presentation of the presents/tributes was a

ritual performance, balanced by the forms of imperial hospitality and bestowal of imperial gifts. Hence the great importance

500 Hodgson 1880, 168.

501 Ibid., 169.

502 Ibid., 170–71.

503 Cp. the order dated VS 1942 (1885 CE) of the Prime Minister Vīra Śamśera to the customs office to waive the customs duties of the goods to be sent to the Chinese Emperor: NGMPP Document E_2779_0001.

of ceremonies, so complicated that they must be practiced under guidance beforehand.⁵⁰⁴

In a report in the *Times* from 25 December 1896, it is said that the

envoy was conveyed there [in the palace] in a green sedan-chair, and the other Nepalese on horseback or in mule carts, the start being made from the Tribute Envoys' Hall, where the whole party were lodged at the expense of the Chinese Government from the moment of their arrival. (...) the official members were conveyed to the great hall of the palace, where they prostrated themselves before the eunuch commissioned to read the Imperial edict authorising the Nepalese to return to their own land.⁵⁰⁵

However, the envoy was only regarded as the bearer of the message and the gifts, not as a representative of his ruler.⁵⁰⁶

The 1866 mission (see next section) only reached the border town Dartsemdo (Kangding), where it was halted allegedly due to a Muslim rebellion in Northwestern China, right on the route from Sichuan to Peking, but probably because the country was not yet consolidated after the second Opium War and the Taiping Rebellion. The leader of the mission and his people were brought to a lousy hovel and was told that they had to wait there for a couple of months. In the end, Jagatsera waited almost 2 years, fell sick for seven months and left the presents with Chinese officials at the border.

The mission had arrived in Lhasa on 24 September 1866. Jagatsera's name is also found in a memorial by the amban of Lhasa, Jing-wen (Chin. 景紋), who had sent the Tributary Mission to Chengdu on 3 November 1866.⁵⁰⁷ He also mentioned that he had sent a Chinese military officer, Wu Guo-ying (吳國英, probably Ucu in Nepālī, from Wu Zong-ye 吳總爺), and other officials to accompany the mission, which might have seemed to them to be a kind of "custody." The Amban later wrote in another memorial on 15 April 1869 that he had sent them back to Kathmandu on 9 February 1869. The Amban reported Jagatsera's

504 Fairbank and Teng 1941, 147.

505 Quoted from Sever 1989, 205.

506 Dabringhaus 1996, 16.

507 Jing-wen in Wu 1986, 50–51.

disappointment, saying that he had to make them accept the unfortunate case several times.⁵⁰⁸

Another reason for the maltreatment of the mission was given by Janga Bahadur Rana. In 1850–1851, he had been to England and France where he met Queen Victoria and Napoleon III, who was then only President of the Republic. Janga was the first Nepalese statesman travelling to Europe and he was treated with all honours and friendly hospitality.⁵⁰⁹ In a meeting with George Ramsay, British Resident Minister from 1852 to 1867, he indicated that the Chinese Emperor had been angry about this trip because he had expected that he would have first come to China. He insinuated that this was the reason why the mission was treated so badly by China (Manandhar and Mishra 1986, 38).

7.2 Kājī Jagatsera and the 1866–1869 Mission

In 1868 (VS 1925), *kājī* Jagatsera Chetri Sijapati (also spelled Jagat Sher, Juggut Ser, Juggut Share, Chin. Za-gad Xier 咱噶達寫熱) submitted a petition (*arjī*)⁵¹⁰ to Prime Minister Janga Bahadur Rana, recounting a meeting during his diplomatic mission to China. During this encounter, he had an exchange with Thomas Thornville Cooper, a British adventurer and traveller, who was actively seeking an overland trade route between China, British India, and eventually Europe. It is worth noting that this meeting occurred approximately one year prior to the opening of the Suez Canal on 17 November 1869, making it somewhat of a precursor to the contemporary “One Belt, One Road” (一帶一路, *yi-dai yi-lu*) strategy (see below).⁵¹¹

Although this meeting may seem like a minor event in the grand scope of global history, a closer examination reveals its significance as a typical illustration of the trans-Himalayan dynamics and the diverse perspectives and temporalities that shaped unstable regions of Highland Asia during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

508 Ibid., 114–15.

509 For a study of this mission including the translation of the travel report (“*Belait Yatra*”), see Whelpton 1983.

510 See Michaels 2019a and, with a revised translation, Part II, 2.1.11.

511 Scholars and officials in Qing China, including Yao Ying and Wei Yuan, were also thinking of a way from Yunnan to Bengal by them (Mosca 2013, 277, 289).

In June 1866, Prime Minister Janga Bahadur Rana, who had assumed power in Nepal on 15 September 1846, decided to dispatch another mission to Beijing. However, he had been hesitant for fourteen years to fulfil this commitment due to the traumatic memories of the previous mission in 1852. During that mission, many members, including the mission leader and deputy, had lost their lives. Moreover, the return journey of the mission had been fraught with mistreatment, particularly at the hands of the Khampas (Tib. Khams pa) on their way. The members of the mission endured beatings and were deprived of food, shelter, and porters.

After the mission's return, Janga Bahadur Rana addressed a letter to the *amban* in Lhasa, stating:

If you will, all is well and we shall continue as friends. If you will not, our friendship shall be broken. We shall withdraw our merchants and subjects from Tibet and shall never again send embassies to the Court of Peking.⁵¹²

The dispatch of the mission in 1852 had indeed sparked the third war between Nepal and Tibet in 1855. During this conflict, China did not provide support to Tibet. Furthermore, the Taiping Civil War and the change of the throne in Beijing from Emperor Dao-guang to Emperor Xian-feng resulted in a delay in addressing various diplomatic matters in 1851. Meanwhile, there was a great flood in the Yellow River and many other rebellions in China around 1855.

On 20 November 1865, King Surendra received a reminder from the imperial court, conveyed by the *amban*, to send an *arjī* and the customary offerings.⁵¹³ This prompted Janga Bahadur to convene his advisors and brothers for consultations. Eventually, he acquiesced and selected the young and loyal *kājī* Jagatsera for the mission. Jagatsera, known for his excellent manners, was the son of a high-ranking military official who had supported Janga Bahadur during the Great Mutiny.

The preparations for the mission began immediately, although the departure from Kathmandu would take place eight months later. As was customary, such missions were led by *kājīs* and *saradāras*, serving as the leader and deputy leader respectively, accompanied by an

512 Foreign, Secret Consultation no. 50, Foreign EA "A" File no. 249/1854, p. 6; G. Ramsay to G.R. Edmonstone, Sec. GI, August 5, 1854, NAI quoted from Upreti 1996, 59.

513 Petech 1996, 183.

average of 45 members (excluding porters). All members underwent screening by the amban residing in Tibet. The delegation consisted of military officials (*subedāra*, *jamadāra*), interpreters, local leaders (*naike*), official scribes (*kharidāra*), cooks, and other support staff.

After completing the necessary preparations, Jagatsera commenced his journey from Kathmandu on 2 August 1866. His route took him through Kerung, Shigatse and Lhasa, with the goal of reaching Beijing and personally presenting the gifts. However, he encountered restrictions and was permitted to go only as far as the Tibeto-Chinese border town of Batang. There, he was allowed to sell some of the goods he had brought for trade.

In the spring of 1868, during his stay in Batang, Jagatsera met a British individual named Mr. “Kupara,” who was none other than Thomas Thornville Cooper (1839–1878), a British adventurer, traveller, merchant, and political agent (Chin. Tang Gu-ba 唐古巴)⁵¹⁴ (Figure 19).

Both Jagatsera and Cooper found solace in sharing their tales of suffering. Jagatsera and his mission encountered numerous challenges and setbacks, enduring a state of being stranded, humiliation, deception, and illnesses.⁵¹⁵ Along the way, they also faced various obstacles that resulted in the loss of valuable goods. Additionally, Jagatsera’s plans to sell opium and generate profit were thwarted.

Similarly, Cooper experienced humiliation (“bully” 陵僞)⁵¹⁶ at the hands of Chinese and Tibetan officials. He was denied permission to continue his journey in Weixi, Yunnan, left with no funds or proper equipment, lacking authoritative travel documents. Like Jagatsera, Cooper also fell ill during his ordeal and was even subjected to arrest for several weeks.

Kājī Jagatsera recounts his initial encounter with Mr. Thomas in the *arjī* addressed to Janga Bahadur Rana (2.1.10) detailing how Cooper inquired about the route to Nepal via Lhasa and requested a travel

514 According to a memorial received on 27 September 1873, 《軍機處檔摺件》，劉嶽昭等 奏，〈奏請准將候補府經歷田昌稼開復降級處分事〉，同治，故機111712 號，頁 1，國立故宮博物院 清代檔案檢索系統。

515 As an example, during the mission, Jagatsera and his team were provided with a daily allowance of 25 ounces of silver, as well as provisions, forage, and palanquins. Initially, Jagatsera had control over the allocation of these resources. However, on the return journey, the responsibility for the silver was handed over to the Chinese interpreter. Unfortunately, the interpreter only distributed a small portion of the allocated amount, as reported by Bishop Chauvean (in Manandhar 2001, 150).

516 *Foreign affairs in their entirety* Tong-zhi, vol. 85, 3–4.



Figure 19: Thomas Thornville Cooper (1839–1878, British traveller and political agent at Bhāmo (source: Archive.org, The Graphic, 28 September 1878)

document. Jagatsera clarified to Cooper that such a passage was not feasible. Furthermore, Jagatsera explained the arduous journey through a region inhabited by uncivilised people and thieves, rendering it impassable. Despite these warnings, Cooper remained resolute in his pursuit of the journey.

Subsequently, Cooper assumed the disguise of a Gorkhali and proceeded on his way. However, he was eventually apprehended in Tibet and expelled from the Tibetan regions. The subsequent circulation of this rumour caused predicaments for Jagatsera at the Tibetan-Chinese border.

In his subsequent letter to Janga Bahadur Rana, dated 15 September 1868,⁵¹⁷ Jagatsera provides an account of his second encounter with

517 This is an abbreviated, simplified and slightly revised version of the document Jagatsera 1868 (Part II, 2.1.11); see Michaels 2019a for more details.

Cooper. According to his report, the British traveller possessed a travel document issued by the Emperor of China, yet it proved ineffective in gaining access to Tibet. Cooper's progress was obstructed by a contingent of 350 soldiers stationed there.

Jagatsera vividly recalls the hardships endured by Cooper during his arduous journey, including scarcity of food and substandard lodging. Additionally, Cooper was incarcerated by the Chinese authorities (in Yunnan) for a duration of 35 days, only securing his release through the means of bribery. It is worth noting that Cooper's original intention was to travel to Burma. However, due to the Panthay rebellion and an unfortunate accident where his horse broke its leg, he was unable to reach his intended destination. Consequently, he found himself in Batang after traversing treacherous, untamed, and snow-covered terrain. Moved by compassion, Jagatsera extended his assistance to Cooper by providing him with nourishment, a sheep, and a horse.

The encounter between Thomas Cooper and *kājī* Jagatsera brings to the forefront a range of new dimensions that extend beyond territorial boundaries. It unveils the unrest in Southwest China and East Tibet, exposing elements such as espionage, mistrust, the limited effectiveness of passports, smuggling, and diverse political judgments and classifications. These aspects are not only substantiated by Cooper's vivid and adventurous travel report of 1871 but also by subsequent accounts detailing the encounter between Jagatsera and Cooper. Together, these reports provide compelling evidence of the intricate dynamics at play during their interaction, highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of the situation.

Thus, Thomas Cooper's description of his initial encounter with Jagatsera conveys an impression that Jagatsera was facing more dire circumstances than Cooper himself.

On the following day, His Excellency Juggut Share (Jagatsera), the Nepalese ambassador, arrived. He was a young man of very courteous bearing, but seemed ill, and his conversation soon showed me that he was not only ill in body but greatly depressed in spirits. His position was anything but pleasant, and he confided to me the history of his embassy on its way so far towards Peking. He had left Khatmandoo nearly two years before, and after a long journey through Thibet, had arrived without encountering any serious difficulties at Ta-tsian-loo, the border town of China. Here he met his first repulse; a messenger from

Pekin brought him an Imperial order to deliver the presents sent by Jung Bahadoor [Janga Bahadur Rana] to the Emperor at that place, and return to Nepaul, as the road to Peking was rendered unsafe by the Nien-fei [Nian Rebellion] rebels. This the young ambassador refused to do, pleading his instructions from Jung Bahadoor, which compelled him to deliver the presents in person. The authorities were determined to enforce the Emperor's orders, and Juggut Share was equally determined to proceed to Peking; another application accordingly had to be made to the Emperor, for a reply to which he waited several months. When it came, it was in the form of a permission to him to proceed as far as Chen-tu (Chengdu), in order to dispose of several hundred chests of opium, brought for sale in China, and then to return home. He soon reached Chen-tu, and hoped to proceed further; but the authorities made this impossible. He could hire neither coolies nor boats, and what was worse, no one would buy his opium; it was too strong, and the people preferred the native drug.

At the time of my arrival, he had spent several months at Chen-tu, vainly pressing his request for leave to proceed to Peking. The officials treated him with great discourtesy, hoping by this means to force him to return, and had lodged him in a dirty hovel outside the city, which, as he said, was so filthy, that he was ashamed to ask me to visit him in it.⁵¹⁸

In August 1868, having escaped from the Chinese officer Tian Chang-jia (田稼昌), he realised the impossibility to reach Assam in British India via Yunnan in China. On his way back to Dartsemdo, Cooper encountered Jagatsera once again at a location referred to by Cooper as "Pa-moo-tan," situated west of Batang. Cooper proceeds to provide the following account:

While thus indulging in pleasant anticipations, a Goorkha came to say that the Ambassador was ready to see me; so off I started for his quarters, where (a great mark of distinction in this country) he received me at the door. When closeted together in his room, I narrated all my misfortunes, and requested permission to join his party, and travel with him to Lhasa. With many expressions of regret, the Ambassador informed me that he

518 Cooper 1871, 158–60; German version: Cooper 1882, 174–78.

dared not let me accompany him, for the Thibetan Government had already given him notice that they would not permit any strangers to join his party. He, however, kindly told me that if I was in need of money, he would be glad to supply my requirements and would also give me a horse. Thus, my hopes were again blighted; and for a moment or two I was unable to speak, so great was my disappointment. In Chen-tu the Ambassador had, with such apparent sincerity, proposed to me to accompany him, that I never dreamed of his now refusing. It seemed improbable that the plea of inability could be genuine, for the Thibetans were unmistakably afraid of the Nepaulese, and I at once naturally concluded that he was afraid to take me with him without the orders of His Royal Highness Jung Bahadoor the Nepaulese Regent, whose jealous dislike of English intrusion into Nepal was too strong for him to relish the idea of introducing an Englishman into the Thibetan nest, where he, in conjunction with the Chinese, finds so many golden eggs. Subsequent information, however, convinced me that Juggut Share would gladly have acceded to my request if he had dared; and I take this opportunity of placing on record my sense of gratitude for the great kindness experienced at his hands. (...)

Early next morning, I repaired to Juggut Share's quarters with pens, ink, and paper, and we both set to work writing; I to her Majesty's representative at Khatmandoo, stating my imprisonment and forced return; and the Ambassador to Jung Bahadoor, from whom he had not heard for several months, as the Chinese had kept back all his despatches. While thus engaged, Juggut Share could not refrain from expressing his utter astonishment in the most amusing manner; every now and again looking at me, as I sat dressed in full European costume, he would say, 'Ah, you Englishmen are wonderful men! Who but an English Sahib would travel alone in such a dreadful country as this, so far away from any of your countrymen?' From such remarks as these, which both he and his officers frequently made during the day, I learnt that whatever may be the jealous dislike of the Nepaulese towards the English in India, they certainly respect and admire the courage of 'the Sahibs.' It was at last time to return to dinner, for, as Juggut Share remarked, with polite apologies, 'his caste' could not allow of our eating together; but he had already shown his thoughtful care by sending a live sheep

to our quarters; and I left him with a promise to call for his letters, and take leave of him, as I passed through the village in the morning.⁵¹⁹

Cooper returned via Hankow (Hankou) to Shanghai in November 1868, Jagatsera via Lhasa to Kathmandu in May 1869, where he was not received with pomp due to the many casualties in his mission.

The accuracy of numerous details in Cooper's and Jagatsera's reports is supported by a report from Bishop Chauvean (Chin. Ding Sheng-rong 丁盛榮),⁵²⁰ who headed the French Jesuit mission at Dartsemdo (Kangding/Ta chien-lu) and had the opportunity to meet both Jagatsera and Cooper.

Following their respective encounters, Cooper returned to Shanghai in November 1868, while Jagatsera made his way back to Kathmandu in May 1869. However, upon Jagatsera's return, he did not receive the expected grand reception due to the significant number of casualties that occurred during his mission.

7.3 Thomas Cooper's Quest for Trade Routes from India to China

In late 1867, Thomas Cooper set out on a voyage from China to Assam after receiving an invitation from the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce. His primary goal was to investigate the feasibility of establishing an overland trade route connecting China and India. On January 4, he commenced his journey from Hankow and traversed through Chengdu, Kangding (Dartsemdo), and Lithang (Litang), ultimately arriving at Bathang (Batang). However, according to the evidence provided by Jagatsera's documents as outlined above, Cooper was forced to retreat by the Tibetans, who did not permit him to proceed further.

Undeterred by the setback, Cooper made a bold decision to pursue an alternative route. He opted to take the path through Dali City (大理), with the intention of reaching Bhamo, situated at the border between Myanmar and China. This new route would lead him through the Panthay kingdom, an area engulfed in a Muslim insurgency, with its capital located in Dali.

519 Cooper 1871, 389–400.

520 Dated 17 July 1868, edited in Manandhar 2001, 148–53.

After his detour through Weixi (維西), Cooper returned to Ya'an (雅安) and embarked on a downstream journey along the Min River (岷江). He continued this route until he reached Yibin (宜賓), where he transitioned to the mighty Yangtze River, following its course downstream. Cooper's voyage along the Yangtze River eventually brought him to the city of Hankow.

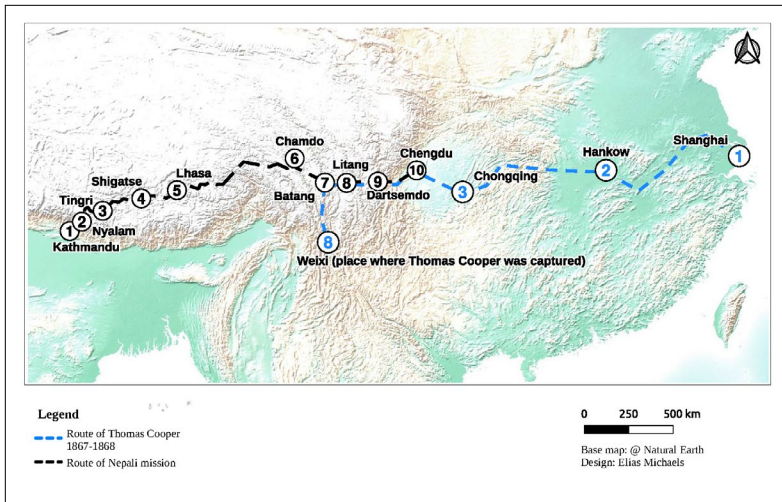
In 1869, Cooper tried to travel in the reverse direction, from Assam to China. Years later, in 1876, he was appointed as a political agent by the India Office and stationed at Bhamo. Tragically, on April 24, 1878, Cooper was assassinated in Bhamo by a sepoy from his own guard, due to a personal grudge.

In his book, *Travels of a Pioneer of Commerce in Pigtales and Petticoats: An Overland Journey from China Towards India*, Thomas Cooper provides an incredibly detailed account of his expedition (Maps 2–3).⁵²¹ The narrative captures the essence of his adventurous journey, which proves to be no less remarkable than the Nepalese missions to China. Cooper's motivations, at times, seem to reflect a reverse interpretation of the “One Belt, One Road” strategy:

The great empires of Asia, almost up to our own time, presented an unknown field, which very few were able to enter upon and explore religious prejudice and Oriental conservatism combined to exclude the intrusive Western strangers; and but recently have we begun to acquire anything like accurate knowledge, either geographically or historically, of the vast empires and peoples of the time East. An angry and jealous fear of the aggressive force of Western civilisation has succeeded to contemptuous prejudice, and, at the present time, renders the Oriental peoples yet more reluctant to admit to the presence of the foreigner, whom still they feel themselves unable to exclude. Of this Oriental exclusiveness, the giant empire of China, slumbering in the conscious pride of its social and political system, which dates from the most distant ages, is the truest type. (...)

More unrestrained and extended commercial and political intercourse between China and the West will materially tend to remove ignorance, the source of prejudice; and foreign commerce, as it advances along her water highways, will be the

521 For the veracity of these and similar accounts of travel accounts of Tibet and China, see Dabringhaus 1994, 99–120.



Map 3: Routes of Thomas Cooper (1867–1868) and the Nepali mission led by Kaji Jagatsera (1866–1869). Route of Thomas Cooper (right to left): 1. Shanghai, 2. Hankow, 3. Chongqing, 4. Chengdu, 5. Dartsemdo, 6. Litang, 7. Batang, 8. Weixi. Route of Jagatsera (left to right): 1. Kathmandu, 2. Nyalam, 3. Tingri, 4. Shigatse, 5. Lhasa, 6. Chamdo, 7. Batang, 8. Litang, 9. Dartsemdo, 10. Chengdu; drawing by Elias Michaels, 2025

herald of the superior Western civilisation, with its steamers, railways, and machinery, be welcomed as a friend, not repelled as a foe. Such a movement of progress will, ere long, it is to be hoped, set in, to save the great empire from the internal decay and ruin which now more than threatens her. To aid in this, by making Englishmen better acquainted with a portion of China, and by pioneering road for the advance of commerce, was the object of my travels; and to have done so will be a full reward.⁵²²

In his evaluation of trade routes from China to India, Cooper assesses three options. However, he notes that two of these routes were effectively impassable due to the ongoing Panthay rebellion in Yunnan and the presence of “Mongol banditti.” As a result, only one route remained open for consideration, which he describes as “the great highway from Sze-chuan [Sichuan] to Lhasa, the capital of Central Thibet [Ü], vice Ta-tsian-loo [Dartsemdo] and Batang.”⁵²³

522 Cooper 1871, 1 and 3–4.

523 Ibid., 4.

Cooper's book is replete with captivating narratives, offering not only thrilling tales but also providing fresh geographical insights into the land, its fauna, and flora. His journey was truly diverse, encompassing periods of illness, hunger, perilous river crossings, daunting gorges (Figure 20), fierce winds, and snowstorms. The route presented formidable obstacles in the form of "terrific snow-clad mountains".⁵²⁴

Throughout his expedition, Cooper encountered political unrest and frequent incidents of robbery, often relying on his pistol for survival. He faced "jealous animosity of the officials, and, as I believed of the people, towards foreigners, wild tribes."⁵²⁵ The journey was compounded by challenges such as unreliable and insufficient information, intrigues, deceitful interpreters, and altercations with porters. Remarkably, Cooper even found himself accidentally married to a local girl due to his unfamiliarity with a ritual, inadvertently leading to an unexpected situation.

Enduring the multitude of challenges he faced, Thomas Cooper remained determined to fulfil an enduring British aspiration—a trade route from China to India.⁵²⁶ The quest for such a route can be traced back to the mid-eighteenth century when the East India Company, based in Calcutta, began exploring ways to expand and enhance trade with Tibet and China, seeking increased profitability. However, the conquest of the Kathmandu Valley by King Prithvi Narayan Bahadur Shah disrupted these plans. Despite Calcutta's efforts to prevent the East India Company's exclusion from the Kathmandu Valley, their military expedition led by Captain George Kinnloch in 1768, intended to assist the ruling Malla kings, was met with strong resistance from the Gorkhalis and ended in failure.⁵²⁷

Consequently, the British had to abandon their ambitions for organizing trade between Bengal, Tibet, and ultimately China via Nepal. Instead, they sought alternative routes, with a particular focus on the Lohit Valley connecting Assam with the Tibetan region of Zayü (Tib. rDza yul), which borders India and Burma. In 1869, Thomas Cooper embarked on this route as well, but his progress was impeded by the Tibetan Mishmi people in Zayü, eventually forcing him to abandon his endeavours.

524 *Ibid.*, 7.

525 *Ibid.*

526 Cp. Cammann 1951, Choudhury 1977.

527 Raj 2012.



Figure 20: Hogg's gorge at the Lan-Tsan-Kiang River in Yunnan (frontispiece in Cooper 1871, source: Archive.org). On this landscape, see Cooper 1868–1869.

These are the concluding sentences in Cooper's *Travel of a Pioneer of Commerce*, marking the culmination of his ambitious expedition and the challenges faced in his pursuit of establishing a trade connection between India and China:

Perhaps at a future date I may submit to the public a narrative of this journey:⁵²⁸ at present it will suffice to say that, after reaching the head-waters of the Braootra [Brahutra], and successfully passing through the savage and treacherous Mishmee tribes to the north of Assam, we reached a point on the frontiers of Thibet not more than a hundred and twenty miles from Bathang, where we were stopped by order of the Thibetan Governor of Zy-yul [Zayü], and compelled, after suffering much from hunger and jungle fever, to return to Calcutta; not, however, relinquishing the hope of some day successfully finding this missing link in our geographical and commercial knowledge of the route from Assam to Thibet.⁵²⁹

528 Cooper in fact did present this "narrative" in his book *The Mishmee Hills; an account of a journey made in an attempt to penetrate Thibet from Assam to open new routes for commerce* (1873).

529 Cooper 1871, 451–52.