

THE SIMLA CONFERENCE AND THE SINO-INDIAN BORDER-DISPUTE

by

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Introduction

The Sino-Indian border dispute remains as one of the major unresolved international conflicts in Asia which has a direct impact on the power politics of the region. It is not far from the truth to say that contemporary Sino-Indian relations are largely determined by this issue. Some of the historical roots of the border dispute date back to the Simla Conference which was intended to decide the status of Tibet and demarcate the undefined boundary between India and Tibet. The following is an attempt to examine the importance of the Simla Conference and the validity of the Simla Convention as a historical document.

However, before we embark upon a discussion of the Simla Conference, a brief reference to China's historical relationship with Tibet prior to the Conference may be appropriate. Although there were relations between China and Tibet at least from the T'ang period (617 A.D - 907 A.D), the close relations began in the 13th Century under the Yuan (Mongol) dynasty (1217 A.D - 1368 A.D). During that period, a special "Lama-Patron" relationship developed between the Dalai Lama and the Yuan Emperor. Under that arrangement, the Yuan Emperor accepted the ecclesiastical authority of the Dalai Lama over the Lamaist adherents of the Tibetan and Mongolian regions, in return for Tibet's recognition of Chinese suzerainty over her. That relationship continued under the Ming dynasty (1368 A.D - 1644 A.D) and later during the Ch'ing (Manchu) dynasty period (1644 A.D - 1911 A.D) China won further privileges in Tibet which virtually became a protectorate of China. Nonetheless, Dalai Lama's spiritual and temporal authority in Tibet did not diminish as a result of these developments. Only in the realms of external affairs and foreign policy that China exercised its overlordship over Tibet. The 1911 Revolution in China which removed the Ch'ing dynasty from power also led to Tibet's declaration of independence, in 1912. The new Republic which was set up under Yuan Shih-k'ai's Presidency, vainly attempted to re-establish China's lost position in Tibet by using both 'carrot and stick' methods. It is apparent that Tibet's independence from China was encouraged by Britain which saw it as a golden opportunity to reduce Chinese influence and in its place establish its own authority there.

I

It was the initiative of the British government that persuaded China and Tibet to participate in a Conference at Simla. From the *Final Memorandum* of McMahon it becomes clear that the British interests in that regard were prompted by three main considerations.¹ First, the British government of India was keen to demarcate a secure boundary between Tibet and India. Second, Britain wanted to exploit the Indo-Tibetan trade to its own advantage.

This article is largely a revised version of a part of Chapter III of the author's Ph.D. dissertation entitled "Foreign Policy of Yuan Shih-k'ai with Special Emphasis on Tibet, 1912-1916", University of Washington, Seattle, U. S. A., 1980.

Third, they were keen to station a British representative in Lhasa and promote British interests and investments in Tibet. Further, to a lesser extent, the British were sensitive to the prospect of Russian and Japanese influence in Tibet which would have threatened the security of India's northern borders.

During the Conference, there was apparent close co-operation between the British and Tibetan sides *vis a vis* China. Even prior to the Conference, the two parties seemed to have come to some understanding about each other's position.² The Tibetan delegate Lonchen Shatra, on his way to India from Tibet, stayed for three months at Gyantse where there was a British Trade Agent named Charles Bell. It is quite likely that the two parties exchanged views on the proposed Conference during that period. As a matter of fact, the Chinese Agent in Calcutta, Lu Hsing-chi. reported that Charles Bell and Lonchen Shatra were intriguing against China.³ It is worth noting here that the British sources also indicate that British officials in India were aware of the contents of the Tibetan proposals before they were formally submitted to the Conference on October 13, 1913.⁴ Moreover, the Tibetan sources reveal that the British and Tibetan sides had secretly negotiated the demarcation of boundary between India and Tibet, and in effect the two sides had already reached agreement by 15th March 1914, before the matter was put to the open Conference.⁵ Thus, the Chinese side was purposely kept in the dark while the British and Tibetans were acting in collusion behind the scene. In fact, in his *Memorandum*, McMahon was full on praise for the Tibetans who co-operated with him. Therefore, it appeared that the Conference was going to be an imbalanced affair where Britain and Tibet were lined up against China. Consequently, any decisions of the Conference were destined to be prejudicial to China.

The British intention to conduct the affairs of the Conference on its own terms was demonstrated by several other incidents. For instance, when Chang Ying-t'ang, who was the Imperial High Commissioner to Tibet under the Ch'ing was to be appointed as the Chinese plenipotentiary to Simla Conference, the British government objected to his name apparently because he was instrumental in reducing British influence in Western Tibet. Instead, they suggested that Ivan Chen who was former Councillor at the Chinese Legation in London be sent to India.⁶ Conceivably, the British government thought that Ivan Chen would be more co-operative towards them than Chang. Then, there was the question of status of Tibetan and Chinese delegates. The Chinese position was that the Tibetan representative should sign after the Chinese delegate and jointly with him, as they did in the Tripartite Trade Agreement of 1908 which implied Chinese authority over Tibet. However, Britain insisted that the Tibetan delegate should be of equal status with the Chinese representative and should sign separately.⁷ Later, when the Chinese government wanted to appoint B. D. Bruce, a British national who served as an officer in the Chinese Customs Service, as Ivan Chen's Secretary, the British government in India protested against his inclusion in the Chinese delegation.⁸ Perhaps, the Chinese government would have thought that the inclusion of a British national in their negotiating team would strengthen their position *vis-a-vis* the British. On the other hand, the Indian government apparently believed that having a British Officer on the Chinese side would make the negotiations difficult for them.

The negotiations at Simla continued from October 1913 until April 1914 in the first instance. The second round of negotiations was conducted from May to July 1914. During the period of negotiations both China and Tibet put forward strong claims to prove their control over Tibet. However, one notable difference between the two sides was the fact that the evidence of the Tibetan side were more voluminous than the Chinese. After lengthy negotiations on the respective proposals of Chinese and Tibetan sides, McMahon worked out a compromise formula which was embodied in the Simla Convention. Accordingly, Tibet was to be divided into two parts, namely, the Inner Tibet where China would exercise sovereign rights and Outer Tibet which was to be virtually independent under British patronage. Despite the fact that the Chinese had a *bona fide* claim to the territory to the east of Salween river in Eastern Tibet, McMahon excluded important parts of that territory such as Chamdo from Inner Tibet which was to have come under close supervision of China. More than the Indo-Tibetan boundary, what was unacceptable to China at that stage was the proposal to withdraw from areas that they actually occupied and administered for more than a decade. The *Final Memorandum* clearly shows that McMahon was not sympathetic to the Chinese. His attitude irked the Chinese government so much that President Yuan Shih-k'ai complained to Sir Jordan, the British envoy in Peking, that "the Government of India as represented by Sir McMahon, were aggressive, exacting and unfriendly . . . 9

McMahon himself acknowledges that even prior to the convening of the final session of the Simla Conference, he had been using coercion as a tactic against China to win concessions. For instance, on 26th March, 1914, he warned that if China's acceptance of British proposals was not forthcoming, he would withdraw the draft proposals and put forward new proposals that would be less favourable to China.¹⁰ On another occasion, he even went to the extent of threatening to "suspend personal relations"* with the Chinese Plenipotentiary if he did not show a "more reasonable attitude" towards the British Proposals.¹¹

II

However, despite such pressures, when the final sessions of the Conference was called on 22nd April 1914, there was no sign of a settlement in sight. The Tibetan delegate also refused to accept the Draft Convention on the grounds that he could not agree to the idea of reinstating a Chinese representative (Amban) in Lhasa and the inclusion of Derge and Nyarong districts in the Inner Tibet.¹² Nonetheless, McMahon himself observed, "I have reason to believe that the attitude of Tibetan delegate today was rather due to his desire to impress Mr. Ch'en than to any intention to reject the present Draft . . .",¹³ indicating that the Tibetan opposition was orchestrated to put pressure on the Chinese. McMahon said that he was "disappointed" by the attitude of his colleagues and postponed the final session to April 27, 1914, when the Chinese delegate promised to place the final instructions from his government before the Conference.

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed Ivan Ch'en on April 25, 1914, that with the exception of Article IX, which dealt with the boundary between Inner and Outer Tibet, China was prepared to accept the rest of the Articles **in principle**.¹⁴ As regards Article IX, Ch'en was instructed to state that China had made "all concessions it could, and now it was up to the British delegate to make further concessions."¹⁵ McMahon considered the Chinese reply "vague" and "elusive". When the Conference convened, he maintained that the Draft Agreement was the best possible solution available and "no new adjustments

* Author's emphasis.

were possible". He further warned that, **"the rejection of the Draft would necessitate a settlement on lines which could not afford equally favourable conditions to the party which withheld its assent".***¹⁶ Thus, once again Ch'en was put under pressure by McMahon. Ch'en said that he could not initial the Draft in its present form without authorization from his government.¹⁷ At this stage McMahon suggested that Ch'en leave the Conference Chamber and think over his decision.¹⁸ After he left, McMahon asked Lonchen Shatra to make a final concession in order to get the Chinese delegate to initial the Convention. He proposed that "a tract of country in the neighbourhood of Lake Kokonor to which the Chinese attached great importance, be excluded from Inner Tibet and included in China proper; and the prohibition against Tibetan representation in the Chinese National Assembly be applied only to Outer Tibet."¹⁹ The Tibetan delegate agreed to McMahon's suggestion. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the concessions proposed by McMahon did not amount to any significant gain for China since the Chinese considered the territory in Kokonor (Chinghai), traditionally a part of China, and there were already Tibetan representatives from Inner Tibet (Kham) in the Chinese National Assembly.

The Continued use of intimidatory tactics by McMahon against the Chinese delegate which would have had a psychological impact on him was admitted by McMahon himself in his summing up report. The importance of this factor has not been adequately considered by writers who have dealt with the subject. However, in the opinion of the present writer, it was indeed a crucial factor which compelled the Chinese delegate to initial the Draft Convention. McMahon reports:

These modifications (the final concessions of McMahon given above), were made in the Convention and in the map, and the **Thibetan representative and I initialled the documents.*** We agreed however, that certain modifications in the Draft would be necessary if our Chinese colleague continued to withhold his consent, and **I specifically mentioned that the words in Article 2, recognizing the suzerainty of China, the cancellation of which had been sanctioned by His Majesty's Government on 21st April, would be omitted unless the Chinese Plenipotentiary initialled the Draft before the conclusion of the meeting.***

In the meanwhile, Mr. Chen and his staff had been closetted with Mr. Rose in a neighbouring room. **It appeared that Mr. Chen found himself in an extremely difficult position. On the one hand, his government though fully informed of the conclusive nature of the meeting, had given him no indication of their willingness to accept our terms; on the other hand, he saw the possibility of losing the Chinese seat in the Tripartite Conference and the danger of the conclusion of an agreement between Great Britain and Tibet alone.*** Mr. Rose had communicated to him the results of my interview with the Lonchen, and had now left him with the doubly initialled documents for a brief period of quiet consideration.

After some delay, Mr. Chen requested that Mr. Rose would see him again for a few minutes; and eventually the whole party re-appeared in the Chamber with the news that the **Chinese Plenipotentiary was ready to initial the Draft and the map, though he would feel bound to await a definite authority from his government before the Convention was formally signed and sealed.***²⁰

* Author's emphasis

In the Record of the Proceedings of the 7th Meeting held on 22nd and 27th April 1914, McMahon further explained the circumstances under which the Chinese delegate initialled the Draft Convention:

The results of the conversation between the British and Tibetan Plenipotentiaries were eventually communicated to him [Ch'en] and he was asked for his final decision. **Mr. Chen then said that in the circumstances he was willing to initial the documents, but on the clear understanding that to initial and to sign them were two separate actions. He also said that he must wait for express instructions from his government before the formal signature of the Convention.*21**

In the final memorandum McMahon admitted, “. . . there was no alternative but to force the Chinese once more to come to terms by threatening for the second time* (in fact it was the third occasion when threat was used) to conclude an independent settlement with the Tibetans alone”, and the Chinese delegate “**added his initial also rather than risk the conclusion of an agreement in which China would have no part**”.*22 Here, we should also note that the Draft Convention and the map were already initialled by McMahon and Lonchen before it was given to Ivan Chen.

The documents of the proceedings of 27th April 1914, found in *The Boundary Question Between China and Tibet*, while basically agreeing with the above accounts given by McMahon himself, throw some additional light on the intimidatory tactics used by McMahon and his staff on that eventful day. One document records:

It was realized however that the draft in its present form would be unsuitable should the Chinese Plenipotentiary withhold his initials, and should the meeting conclude without arriving at an agreement on a tripartite basis. **It was therefore agreed that, unless Mr. Chen was able to co-operate with them, it might become necessary to eliminate the clause recognising the suzerainty of China, and ipso facto the privileges appertaining thereto.*23**

Another reports :

After a little while Sir Henry McMahon then asked Mr. Rose to have some talk with Mr. Chen in a separate room where Mr. Rose said that after all these difficult and long negotiations it was becoming very grave and said **if Mr. Chen left the Foreign Office without initialling the Draft Convention, Mr. Chen would have nothing to do with this office***. Mr Rose then asked Mr. Chen to initial unless his Government had given him distinct orders to do otherwise.

Mr. Chen expressed regret about his inability of initialling anything and said all he could do was to communicate any reply to his government. He was not authorised to do otherwise. Until he was authorized by his government he could not initial the Draft Convention.*

* Author's emphasis

Mr. Rose said there was no such custom as to get an order to sign a Convention. To this Mr. Chen replied by giving an example of Labour Convention of 1904, the authorities to sign which Convention was duly obtained by the former Chinese Minister in London. Just then a paper was brought in with a sketch map for Rose. Mr. Rose then said that it came from Sir Henry McMahon and it stated that he had arranged with Lonchen Shatra to delimit a tract of territory in the vicinities of Chinghai to China and to insert the word "Outer" before the sentence "Tibet shall not be represented in Parliament or other similar body". **Mr. Rose then went on to say that the Convention had already been initialled by Sir Henry McMahon and Lonchen Shatra and showed their initials, and again urged that if Mr. Chen did not initial the Draft Convention today, the Article II and IV were to be deleted and the Convention was to be concluded today without China.*** Mr Rose further asked whether the Chinese Government had given authority not to initial the Convention. Mr. Chen replied he had received no authority either express or implied to initial or not to initial it.

Mr. Rose then said **to initial only still required confirmation and ratification by his Government*** otherwise the situation would be a very serious one.

Mr. Chen then replied that he would initial the Draft Convention in order to save the the grave situation on the clear understanding that to initial and to sign were two separate actions,* and to sign the Draft Convention he must wire to his Government for definite instructions.

To this Mr. Rose fully agreed and said everything required confirmation by the respective Governments, before the signature could be given to the Convention.*

Under the circumstances Mr. Chen initialled the Draft Convention and Sketch Map in the Conference Room.²⁴

Therefore, it is beyond doubt that the initialling of the Simla Convention by the Chinese delegate was done under pressure. On the same day, Ivan Ch'en telegraphed the Chinese government and informed them that the circumstances forced him to initial the documents. Ch'en was told by McMahon that if he did not do so, Article II and IV would be deleted and Britain would conclude the Agreement with Tibet alone,²⁵ which meant that China would lose whatever rights and privileges that it was entitled under the Convention in Outer Tibet.

III

Two days later, on 29th April 1914, the Chinese government repudiated Ivan Ch'en's action and demanded the cancellation of the initialling.²⁶ At the same time China stressed that it did not wish to break-off the the negotiations. McMahon suspected that China's refusal to accept the Convention was due to Lu Hsing-chi's advice to reject it.²⁷ Even contemporary writers accept McMahon's reasoning and go to state that it was Lu's advice which led China to reject the initialling.²⁸ Nonetheless, as shown above, even without Lu Hsing-chi's advice it was not possible for the Chinese government to accept the Convention.

* Author's emphasis

First, the Convention disregarded the boundary between Inner and Outer Tibet claimed by China. Second, as a self-respecting sovereign government, China could not accept a treaty which was initialled under coercion.

Although McMahon's own statements quoted above and the other records of the event explicitly prove that the Chinese delegate was forced to initial the Convention when the Chinese government protested against McMahon's action, he dismissed it as an entirely unfounded allegation.²⁹ Also, in his memorandum regarding the progress of negotiations from 1st May 1914, to 8th July 1914, McMahon stated that when the Chinese delegate initialled the Convention, "there can be no doubt that he did so with a feeling of of great relief",³⁰ and that he "admitted that he had obtained more favourable terms than could reasonably have been expected".³¹ Since this memorandum was written more than two and a half months after the incident, it is conceivable that McMahon purposely changed the description of the events of 27th April 1914, to mellow the harshness of his attitude. Nevertheless curiously enough, as shown above, he contradicts himself in other places. Most Indian authors, take McMahon's latter statement to argue that Ivan Ch'en initialled the Convention with satisfaction.³² According to one of them (whose work appears to be one of the best to be written by an Indian author to-date on the subject):

The map and the proceedings of the Conference on the fateful 27th April would thus demonstrate, **and beyond the shadow of doubt*** that with the modifications in the Kokonor region, all the three Plenipotentiaries including Ivan Chen, **accepted*** the Red and Blue lines defining Inner and Outer Tibet as delimited (on the Convention map), on behalf their respective governments. This despite earlier Chinese and Tibetan reservations, the former's with regard to the nomenclature and of both in respect of the allocation of districts each coveted of the other.³³

Most of the Indian writings on the McMahon Line, show a pro-Indian bias. Interpreting the events of 27th April 1914, based on McMahon's later memorandum, they attempt to prove that China in fact accepted the Simla Convention and thereby legitimise the McMahon Line as the historically accepted boundary between India and Tibet in the eastern sector. The same author quoted above points out further that Ch'en in fact put his signature to the document, and therefore he legally signed the Convention.³⁴

In this context one could compare the two maps attached to the respective Simla Conventions on which the delegates have put their signatures. On the first map which is dated 27th April 1914 it is clearly stated, "we hereby **initial*** in token of our acceptance" and just below that endorsement McMahon has **initialled*** it. However, for some unknown reason, Ivan Chen and Lonchen Shatra have signed on the map. On the second map dated 5th July 1914 it is endorsed, "we hereby **sign*** and **seal*** in token of our acceptance" and only McMahon and Lonchen Shatra have put their full signatures on it. Therefore, it is quite clear that the first document was only meant to be a tentative one. The fact that McMahon himself did not sign but initialled the first map and then signed and sealed the second one goes to prove that it is the second map that should be considered as the more authoritative one which the Chinese delegate refused to sign. Therefore, one could argue that since China **did not sign*** the final

* Author's emphasis

Convention and the map, she is not bound to accept the McMahon Line as a boundary between China and India. Further, as shown above, both McMahon and Rose had made it clear to Ch'en that initialling would be only the first step before a formal signing of the Convention. It is also important to note that McMahon himself refers to the 27th April Convention as the **Draft Convention*** which implies that he did not consider it as a final treaty.

The fact that the Conference continued until 3rd July 1914, in order to seek China's approval for the Convention makes it more than obvious that the initialled document was only a provisional agreement. Moreover, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the British Home Government had instructed the Indian government on 21st April 1914, that "McMahon may initial the agreement, but signature must be deferred pending reference to Russia".³⁵ This once again proves that the initialled document was not a final agreement. Finally, both British and Chinese records show that when Ivan Ch'en initialled the Convention he made it explicitly clear that he was doing so with the understanding that initialling and signing were two different procedures and he had to obtain approval from the Chinese government before formally signing it. When he asked for governmental approval accordingly, his request was turned down. Therefore, it is unfair for anyone to claim that the Simla Convention was a valid document at all.

The formal Chinese position on the proposed Draft Convention was explained to the British Minister in Peking by the Secretary to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who had been sent by the President to meet him on May 1, 1915.³⁶ The Secretary said that the President's main objection to the Convention was based on the boundary issue, specifically "the inclusion in Outer Tibet of Chamdo and the southern portion of the Kokonor territory". The Chinese had maintained that the southern boundary of Chinghai (Kokonor) was the Tangla range. Later, even Jordan admitted that southern Chinghai, along with Litang, and Batang, had been Chinese territory for some time.³⁷ Chamdo had been China's central administrative and military base in Kham; and it had been suggested by both Fu Sung-mu and Hu Ching-i (Chinese officials in charge of boundary affairs) to be the capital of the proposed Hsi-k'ang province in South-western China. It was safely under China's control at the time of the initialling of the Simla Convention. As such, from the Chinese point of view, withdrawing from Chamdo was impossible, and it is not surprising that Yuan refused to go along with the British proposal.

For the British, the importance of Chamdo was different. McMahon stated, "I am firmly of the opinion that exclusion of Chamdo from autonomous Tibet would perpetuate present disturbed state of the country and imperial safety of Tibet".³⁸ Both northern and southern roads leading to Tibet from Szechwan converged at Chamdo, and consequently, Chamdo was of great strategic importance in the Tibetan Marches. Therefore, the British side insisted that the control of Chamdo should be given back to Outer Tibet.

Although China's objection to the Draft Convention centered around the said boundary issue, which was by no means an unimportant one, even in other areas the gains expected for the British and Tibetan sides were substantial. According to McMahon, there were several important gains the British could obtain from the Convention.³⁹ First, was the right of the British Agent at Gyantse to proceed to Lhasa and directly negotiate with the

* Author's emphasis

Tibetan government in case of need. This was the culmination of a long-cherished dream of the British Government in India to have a representative in Tibet. The Indian government had tried once before to achieve this objective but failed because of disapproval of the Home Government. With this proviso, the British could easily manipulate events in Lhasa in their favour. Thus, whatever advantages the Chinese envisaged in stationing their own Amban in Lhasa, under the Convention, his power would have been skillfully neutralised. Moreover, the close relationship that had developed between Britain and Tibet by then would have led the Tibetans to rely more on Britain than China, in case of an emergency. Thereby, the British hoped to achieve a significant foot-hold in Tibet. McMahon described the new role Britain hoped to play in Tibet in the following fashion:

The government of autonomous Tibet will find itself faced with new questions and new responsibilities; they will naturally turn towards British representative for advice and assistance, and on the nature of that advice, the future of Tibet will largely depend.

Second, Britain expected to enjoy commercial privileges in Tibet along with China. In the past, except for the brief Younghusband interlude, Britain's trade interests in Tibet were subordinated to the Chinese. Therefore, from the point of view of Britain, the Convention provided a major break-through.

Third, the British government hoped to become the arbitrator between China and Tibet. Thereby, Britain could exercise indirect control and influence over Tibet, and prevent a recurrence of any future predominance of Chinese power and control there. In that sense, the British expected to make a subtle gain in Tibet.

Fourth, the Convention prohibited China from coming to agreements only with Tibet. Accordingly, in the future China could not enter into any agreements with Tibet without British participation. Here, we should note that the Republican Government of China since its inception until the convening of the Tripartite Conference, on several occasions, acting on the presumption that Tibet was a part of China, attempted to find some accommodation with Tibet without the knowledge and concurrence of the British. If the Chinese overtures had succeeded, China's position in Tibet *vis a vis* Britain would have been significantly strengthened. Such a situation was obviously detrimental to the British interests in Tibet. Thus, the Convention provided checks against any such prospective move by China in Tibet.

Fifth, under the Convention, Outer Tibet would have become virtually independent under British patronage. Thus, while the aspirations of the British Government of India in establishing a buffer zone between China and India would have been accomplished, China's gains in Western Tibet were to be mostly confined to the symbolic reinstatement of an Amban at Lhasa.

Further, the Chinese assertion that Tibet formed a part of China was not to be included in the main text of the Convention, but to take the form of an exchange of notes between Britain and China.

Therefore, the proposed Convention was designed in such a way to weaken China's position and to strengthen Britain's hand in Tibet. Tibet at the end of the Conference was strongly on Britain's side. From China's point of view, the Convention did little (except for the acceptance of China's suzerainty over Tibet, and the right to station an Amban there) to help China regain its control in Tibet, which it had hoped the negotiations at Simlsa would do.

In general, Chinese public opinion was not favourable towards the Simla Conference. The *Ching-ching shih pao*, a Chinese newspaper, while being critical of the Conference, subtly attacked the position of the Chinese government as well. It said, "Tibet has long desired to be independent, and in this she has been egged on by Great Britain, of which she is a puppet," and referring to the division of Tibet it commented, "Great Britain is willing to grant this concession to China because she knows the latter's fondness for an empty name; in fact both Ch'ien and Hou Tsang [Outer and Inner Tibet] will be entirely within Great Britain's power,"⁴⁰ When the Chinese government objected to the initialling of the Convention it clearly stated that China accepted all provisions of the Convention except Article IX **only in principle**;⁴¹ thus implying that China desired further negotiations before a final treaty was concluded. In fact at an interview with Jordan on 13th June 1914, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sun Pao-ch'i, complained that China gained very little from the Convention.⁴² The Minister in London also informed the British Government that China wished to continue the negotiations.⁴³ The Chinese government hoped that such future negotiations might be carried out between Britain and China, either in London or in Peking.⁴⁴ The view of the Chinese government was that the Tibetan question could be settled between Britain and China in the same manner as the Mongolian question had been settled between Russia and China.⁴⁵ Thus, it appeared from China's point of view, that the Simla Convention was not a final treaty.

IV

The British government remained determined not to change the Convention. They waited for more than a month, hoping that China would succumb to pressure and ultimately sign the Convention. In the meantime, the Convention was referred to Russia for consent. As a result of those consultations, Article X, which had provided that Britain should act as the arbitrator in disputes between China and Tibet, was modified in the form of a simple provision that the English text of the Convention should be considered authoritative in case of need. Also, a clause was included to the XIth Article saying that the Convention should take effect from the date of signature.⁴⁶ It is interesting to note here that Russia wanted the Convention to take effect only after formal signing. It may be that they were betting on China not to sign it.

On 6th June 1914, Jordan warned China once again that if it did not sign the Convention, Britain would go ahead and sign a separate treaty with Tibet, and that China would be barred from enjoying the privileges provided in the Draft Convention.⁴⁷ In reply, the Chinese Minister for Foreign Affairs informed Jordan that the President felt it impossible for China to proceed beyond the proposals embodied in the previous Chinese statements. He

* Author's emphasis

stressed that if the demand that China should yield her sovereignty over regions not only occupied by her soldiers but administered by Chinese Magistrates were persisted in, the Chinese government would refuse to sign the Tripartite Convention.⁴⁸

The Chinese Foreign Minister proposed a new compromise formula to Jordan with the hope that some agreement could be reached even at the last moment. He proposed : (a) that the territory between the Salween and Tachienlu should form Inner Tibet; (b) that China would have the complete freedom to administer Inner Tibet and consolidate its control there; (c) that the Dalai Lama's ecclesiastical authority in Inner Tibet would be allowed; and (d) that the northern boundary for Outer Tibet should be at the Tangla Range and the south-western portion of Chinghai would be placed in Inner Tibet.⁴⁹

Those proposals reflected significant changes in Chinese policy toward the Tibetan Marches. It was the first time that China was willing to accept the Marches as a separate entity from the rest of China. In effect these proposals agreed to the Sino-Tibetan boundary suggested by McMahon. Although China was not willing to give up any territory it already held to the Tibetan government, at least technically, it was prepared to accept the British argument that the Tibetan Marches did not belong to China. Evidently, Yuan Shih-k'ai was eager to come to terms with Britain with some formula which would be palatable to the Chinese people and the British government, for, he needed British support for his monarchical movement.

After mutual consultations among the Indian government, the British Home government, and Jordan, the British government instructed Jordan to inform the Chinese government that it would be impossible to accept the Chinese proposals which would bring the line of Inner Tibet within 200 miles of Lhasa, and the only concession they could grant to China was to lower the northern boundary of Inner Tibet from Altyn Range (A-er-chin-shan), to the K'un-lun range, thereby placing most of Southern Chinghai in China proper.⁵⁰ Jordan was further instructed to inform the Chinese government that if they did not agree to the British proposals, the British delegate would call a final meeting of the Conference at the end of the month and Britain and Tibet would go ahead and sign the treaty. He was also asked to notify the Chinese government that, in that event the British government would be compelled to give Tibet whatever assistance against any Chinese aggression. Thus, Britain indicated for the first time that the British government was prepared to provide military assistance to Tibet if Britain and Tibet signed the treaty alone. Jordan conveyed the message to the Chinese government on 25th June 1914.

The Chinese government refused to accept the British ultimatum and on 25th June 1914, replied that as a final concession, China was willing to make Jyade a special area of Inner Tibet where "only civil officials will be sent accompanied by a reasonable number of troops to guard them" and promised that "no large bodies of troops will be stationed there."⁵¹ This was meant to meet the objection raised by Britain that the boundary of Inner Tibet proposed by China was within 200 miles of Lhasa and posed a threat to the Tibetan government. The memorandum of the Chinese Foreign Office to the British Minister made it quite clear that there would be no further concessions on the part of China, and emphasized that although China might not sign the Convention. "it has no desire to terminate the negotiations, and it is unable to regard the initialling of the Convention by its special envoy Mr. Ch'en which

took place without instructions as effective". It further said, "if the Tibetans do not cross the Chinese boundary, the Chinese troops will continue to hold the places in which they were originally quartered, and no advance or acts of invasion whatever will take place". Thus, the Chinese government's final position was that it could not sign the Convention in its present form, but hoped to continue further negotiations, and would agree to a cease fire until the issue was resolved. The cease-fire agreed upon by China was maintained until 1917 when the Tibetans began a massive attack on the Chinese positions.

When the British government was convinced that the Chinese side would not sign the Convention, the last meeting of the Conference was scheduled for 3rd July 1914, for the purpose of closing the negotiations.⁵² **On that day, Ivan Ch'en told the Conference quite clearly that he would not sign the Convention and that the Chinese government would not recognise any treaty or similar document that might now or hereafter be signed between Great Britain and Tibet.⁵³ Thereby, China completely disassociated itself from the Simla Convention.*** The British and Tibetan delegates then signed a declaration to the effect that China to be debarred from its privileges as long as China withheld its signature.⁵⁴ A separate trade agreement was also signed between Tibet and Britain. Thus, as Lamb has pointed out, the Simla Convention was not formally signed by anyone.⁵⁵ McMahon and Lonchen only initialled the revised copies of the Convention containing amended Articles X and XI as agreed upon by Russia and Britain. The proceedings were conducted to give the Chinese representative the impression that the Convention was actually signed by Tibet and Britain.⁵⁶ Perhaps it was done with the hope that it would induce the Chinese delegate to reconsider his position at the last moment. Although the trick did work on the previous occasion, this time Ivan Ch'en was under specific instructions not to sign. McMahon in fact wanted to sign the Convention with Tibet, but the Home Government was opposed to it.⁵⁷ It may be that the Home Government was concerned about Russia's possible objection to a bipartite treaty between Tibet and Britain which violated the understanding of the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. Since, according to the first clause of Article XI of the Simla Convention, it was to become effective only after its signature by the parties concerned, the Simla Convention has to be considered as a document which does not carry any legal status and should thus be null and void. The Simla Conference itself, therefore, was a diplomatic failure.

Conclusion

However, the memories of the Simla Conference lingers on in Chinese minds. China contends that the MaMahon Line is an imperialist legacy which was drawn up by the British rulers to safeguard their imperialist motives against the wishes and aspirations of the Chinese people. Therefore, China has called upon India to jointly repudiate the McMahon Line and negotiate a new boundary agreement between the two countries. Late Premier Chou En-lai clearly expounded the Chinese position on the matter when he wrote to Indian Prime Minister late Shri Jawaharlal Nehru on 8th September, 1959, when he stated:

. . . the Simla Conference was an important step taken by Britain in its design to detach Tibet from China. At the Conference were discussed the so-called boundary between Outer and Inner Tibet and rest of China . . . The so-called McMahon Line was never discussed at the Simla Conference, but was determined by the British

* Author's emphasis

representative and the representative of the Tibet local authorities behind the back of the representative of the Chinese Central Government through an exchange of secret notes at Delhi on March 24, 1914 . . . The so-called McMahon Line was a product of the British policy of aggression against the Tibetan region of China and has never been recognised by any party to the Simla Treaty, it was not formally signed by the representative of the Chinese Central Government, and this is explicitly noted in the Treaty.⁵⁸

As shown above, there is great deal of substance in the main argument of Chou En-lai and the Chinese do have a genuine grievance against the Simla Conference. India should recognise the fact that China was coerced into initialling the Simla Convention which was not signed and ratified by China. Accordingly, as two of the most important nations of the Third World who share a common imperialist heritage it is nothing but proper to renegotiate their boundaries and reach a long-lasting settlement. In this connection we should note that China has reached fair and reasonable border agreements with India's neighbours Pakistan, Afganistan, Burma, and Nepal. A similar agreement would benefit both China and India who need to divert funds from defence to national development.

In this regard one should also make an attempt to understand the Chinese thinking on the matter. China opposes the Simla Conference and the McMahon Line not merely because they are "imperialist symbols"⁵⁹ or due to the Chinese desire to "regain the full territory and standing of the Chinese Empire at its peak".⁶⁰ It stems largely from their deep-rooted spirit of nationalism⁶¹ which aspires to complete the recovery of Chinese sovereignty lost to foreign imperialism. Regaining complete sovereignty is important for a nation to establish its identity. China's long struggle against the unequal treaties was one step in that direction.

Another area in which China's sovereign rights have been violated is in the sphere of national boundaries. China lost a mass of territory to Russian, British, French and Japanese imperialism since the Opium War until the end of the Second World War. Although some of those lands have been recovered since then, China believes that in drawing up of the Indo-Tibetan border by McMahon at the Simla Conference it lost a large tract of territory to India. Thus, the Chinese perception of the events at the Simla Conference still influence her thinking on Sino-Indian relations. This is not to say that the Chinese policy towards India rests solely on the imperatives of Chinese nationalism or the memories of the humiliations at Simla. Nonetheless, it is true that China's bitter experience at the Simla Conference remains to-date a determining factor in shaping Chinese thinking on the Sino-Indian border dispute. The recognition and understanding of this fact by India would pave the way for a speedy resolution of the Sino-Indian border problem and the improvement of their mutual relations.

NOTES

1. Foreign Office, Great Britain (hereafter cited as F. O.), 535/17, No. 231, India Office to Foreign Office, 25th August 1914. encl. 1. Final Memorandum of A. H. McMahon on the Simla Conference (hereafter cited as **Memorandum**).
2. Ibid.
3. Lu Hsing-chi, **Hsi-tsang Chiao-she chi-yao**, (Taipei, 1954), p. 45a.
4. F. O. 228/2582, No 57, Viceroy of India (hereafter cited as Viceroy) to Her Majesty's Minister (hereafter cited as HMM), 8th October, 1913.
5. W. D. Shakabpa, **Tibet : A Political History**, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1968,) pp. 256-257
6. F. O. 228/2580, No. 73, Sir Jordan (Her Majesty's Minister in Peking) to Sir E. Grey (Foreign Secretary), 26th June 1913.
7. F. O. 228/2581, No. 93, Jordan to Grey, June 23, 1913.
8. F. O. 228/2582, No. 49, Viceroy to HMM, 6th October 1913.
9. F. O. 228/2582, No. 27, Jordan to Grey, 21st April 1914.
10. **Memorandum**.
11. Ibid.
12. F. O. 228/2585, No. 28, Viceroy to HMM, 22nd April 1914.
13. Ibid.
14. **Boundary Question between China and Tibet** (hereafter cited as **BQ**) (n. p. Peking 1940), pp. 132-133; Lu Hsing-chi, op cit p. 47b.
15. Ibid. For the text of the Convention see, Ibid pp. 91-96.
16. **BQ**, p. 120.
17. Ibid.
18. **Memorandum**.
19. Ibid.; **BQ**, p. 121; **Chung-Tsang Chieh-wu- i-chien Shu**, (n. p., n. d.) (hereafter cited as **CCS**), p. 23a; **Tsang-an Chih-Luch** n. p., 1919, (hereafter cited as **TCL**), 15 b; Lu Hsing-chi, p. 47b.
20. Memorandum, encl. No. 4, Progress of Negotiations, December 25, 1913 to 30th April 1914.
21. **BQ**, p. 122.

22. **Memorandum.**
23. **BQ**, p. 121-122.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 140-142.
25. **TCL**, p. 15b; Lu Hsing-chi, p. 48a; F. O. 228/2585, No. 49, Wai-chiao-pu (Chinese Foreign Office) Memorandum to HMM, 1st May 1914. See **BQ**. pp. 91-96 for the text of the Convention.
26. F. O. 228/2585, No. 42, India Office (hereafter cited as India) to HMM, 29th April 1914.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Alastair Lamb, **The McMahon Line**, 2 Vols (London. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) Vol II p. 595.
29. F. O. 228/2525, No. 42, India to HMM 29th April 1914.
30. **Memorandum**, encl. No. 5, Proceedings 1st May 1914 to 8th July 1914.
31. *Ibid.*
32. P. Mehra, **McMahon Line and After**, (New Delhi: MacMillan, 1974,) p. 244; P. C. Chakravarti, **India's China Policy**, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1962), pp. 21-22.
33. Mehra, p. 220.
34. *Ibid.* Perhaps in the ensuing excitement Ivan Ch'en put his full signature instead of his initials.
35. F. O. 228/2585, No. 36, Viceroy to HMM, 27th April 1914.
36. F. O. 228/2585, No. 46, Jordan to Grey, 1st May 1914.
37. F. O. 228/2585, No. 52, India to HMM, 2nd May 1914.
38. *Ibid.*
39. **Memorandum**
40. F. O. 228/2585, No. 25. Encl, **Ching-ching Shih-Pao**, 12th June 1914.
41. F. O. 228/2585, No. 44, Jordan to Grey, 30th April 1914.
42. F. O. 228/2586, No. 34, Jordan to Grey, 16th June 1914.
43. F. O. 228/2585, No. 47, Grey to Jordan, 1st May 1914.
44. F. O. 228/2585, No. 49, Memorandum from Wai-chiao-pu to HMM, 1st May 1914.

45. **North China Herald**, 2nd June 1914.
46. **Memorandum**. See also, F. O. 228/2585, No. 10, Viceroy to HMM, 7th April 1914.
47. F. O. 228/2586, No. 10, Note from Jordan to Chinese Foreign Ministry, 6th June 1914.
48. F. O. 228/2586, No. 34, Jordan to Grey, 16th June 1914.
49. CCS p. 23.
TCL pp. 19a-19b.
50. F. O. 228/2586, No. 47, Grey to Jordan, 24th June 1914. CCS, p. 24a. TCL p. 20a.
51. F. O., 228/2586, No. 54, Wai-chiao-pu Memorandum to HMM, 29th June 1914.
52. F. O., 228/2586, No. 57, Grey to Jordan, 30th June 1914.
53. **BQ**. p. 147.
54. F. O., 228/2586, No. 64, Viceroy to HMM, 4th July 1914.
55. Lamb op. cit, pp. 518-520
56. F. O., 228/2586, No. 64, Viceroy to HMM, 4th July 1914.
57. F. O., 371/931, No. 30825, Secretary of State to Viceroy, 3rd July, 1914.
58. **Documents on the Sino-Indian Boundary Question**, (Peking, Foreign Language Press, 1960,) p. 6.
59. Lamb, op. cit., p. 590.
60. See for instance, C. P. Fitzgerald, **China's View of Their Place in the World**, (London, Oxford University Press, 1964).
61. The relationship between Chinese nationalism and foreign policy is discussed in Mary Wright, ed. **China in Revolution: The First Phase, 1900-1913**, 2nd ed., (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1972), Introduction. Joseph W. Esherick, **Reform and Revolution in Hunan and Hubei**, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976). John E. Schrecker, **Imperialism and Chinese Nationalism : Germany in Shantung**, (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1971). Chang Chung-fu, **Chung-hua min-kuo wai-chiao shih**, (Taipei, 1962), Hu Sheng, **Ti-kuo chu-i yu chung-kuo cheng-chih**, (Peking, 1952). See also, K. M. M. Werake, "Foreign Policy of Yuan Shih-k'ai, with special emphasis on Tibet, 1912-1916", Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle, U. S. A. pp. 1-7 and pp. 131-191.