Südasien-Chronik - South Asia Chronicle 10/2020, pp. 249-266 © Südasien-Seminar der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin ISBN: 978-3-86004-346-2

High Tea in Central Asia: Palampur Fair and the Kangra Tea Enterprise[1]

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KEYWORDS: GREAT GAME, HIMALAYA, IMPERIALISM, KANGRA, TEA

Introduction

The 1840s were a time of drastic changes in South Asia. The English East India Company (EIC), then in its final decade as sovereign, had grown into a veritable Leviathan, completing the painting of the entire subcontinent in imperial red with a double phased conquest of the Punjab during the "Anglo-Sikh Wars" of 1845-46 and 1848-49. With borders now stretching to Afghanistan in the northwest and the Himalayan states in the north, British officials and businessmen scanned the extended horizon for new threats and opportunities in agreement with the modern iteration of the empire's 'gentleman capitalism' (Cain & Hopkins 2016: 308-29). The establishment and recruitment of a burgeoning tea industry in the Kangra and Kullu Valleys of the Punjab Hills (nowadays districts in Himachal Pradesh, India) to further the interests of empire in High Asia exemplifies this process.

This paper examines the practicalities of imperial expansion efforts across the Himalaya through the combination of private and governmental agents. As part of the strategies that underlay the competition between certain circles of decision-makers in the British and Russian governments for influence in Asia (alias "Great Game"), these practicalities entailed the harnessing of British colonisers' efforts at tea cultivation for the benefit of establishing ties with Ya'qub Beg's inde-

pendent Kashgaria (1864-77). The pact between planters and proponents of the Forward School of British diplomacy manifests in repeated missions to Yarkand and in the establishment of a trans-Himalayan fair at Palampur *circa* 1867-79. Advancing British imperial interests and private profits from a rising demand for tea across the globe, the initiative demonstrates the 'imperialism of free trade' in action. As in other parts of India, the reshaping of the Himalayan foothills in modernity can be traced to the by-lanes of industrialising England.

Early colonisation in Kangra, 1846-67

The tenth child of a Liverpudlian merchant, Sir Thomas Douglas Forsyth (1827-86) ranks among the pioneer of British rule in Kangra. Having disembarked in Calcutta in March 1848, the EIC novice advanced to the post of deputy commissioner in the Punjabi township of Pakpattan within just one year. Contracting illness shortly after, Forsyth travelled to Simla to recuperate. He there came under the patronage of Governor-General Dalhousie (1848-56), who appointed him assistant commissioner of the summer capital, where he also marred. By 1850 he had regained sufficient health to assume a position in the Kangra Valley, where he spent four blissful years that he would posteriorly describe as 'the nearest perfection to official life.' Indeed,

> [s]ituated in a lovely valley, surrounded by snow-clad mountains, and having to deal with a simple mountaineer race, the English officer exercised a sort of patriarchal sway very much unfettered, for it was too early in the era of administration for codes and regulations to be enforced on an outlying mountain district. Justice was often as not administered in the open air under a tree, and the word of 'Hakim' was accepted as law. A strong bond between the ruler and the people existed, and thus the most pleasant relations were established. Before a road could be made or a bridge built, the district officer's opinion always had to be taken – nothing, in fact, could be done without his intervention. (Forsyth 1887: 14f.)

The assistant commissioner’s reminiscences reflect the heady mixture of romantic and authoritarian sentiments that fuelled his work in the valley. These efforts were not solely intended for the benefit of its "simple" inhabitants. Upholding Dalhousie’s expansionist policy, Forsyth was to actively encourage retired military officers and private entrepreneurs to settle in the valley of mild climate by promoting its lands as a cheap and viable option for cultivating tea. Lured by generous funding schemes, business minded-settlers heeded the call with

hopes of emulating the prosperous tea industry that had begun blossoming in Assam and Bengal in the preceding decades.[2]

The first plantation estates were sponsored by government as early as 1850, to which Forsyth added several more. Within a year of his appointment, over 1,000 acres of land, 'untouched by the people on account of some local superstition', were allotted to the scheme by the officer's industrious patron, Lord Dalhousie.[3] A specially designated officer (Edward Paske) was trained to identify and negotiate the purchase of lands appropriate for tea cultivation from landholding elites. The relatively high altitude, nutrient rich-soils that received abundant rainfall along the eastern slopes of the Dhaula Dhar were particularly prized. Once purchased, these were sold to government- and privately-owned enterprises that enjoyed a steady supply of saplings free of charge from government run-nurseries in Kumaon.

The misperception of the Kangra and Kullu Valleys—then still comprising one district—as 'entirely free from malarious fever' was presented as an exceptional incentive for colonisation.[4] For, unlike their colleagues in Assam, who were forced to abandon their plantations with the onset of the monsoons to avoid the lethal diseases unleashed by the rains, the Kangra planters could remain in their estates throughout the year. Proponents of the tea industry advanced this as a singular advantage, sine 'the success of a plantation must depend on the physical energy and close personal supervision of the owner or manager.'[5] If that were not enough, the transport of produce from the plantations to regional markets was entirely covered by the government, which supplied *corvée* or unpaid labour by adopting the pre-existing tradition of '*begar*', in which local peasants would periodically provide services to their landlords free of cost.[6]

The measures that were devised for developing the tea industry persisted well after Forsyth's departure from Kangra in 1854. The bulk of the plantations concentrated along the elevated slopes of *tehsil* 'Palam' at the north-eastern end of the Kangra Valley, where the climatic and geophysical conditions were optimal, and a township developed in its midst. The initial investments began to bear fruit in the early 1860s, prompting local entrepreneurs to join the industry that they had till then viewed with suspicion (Lyall 1874: 81). Reporting on a tour through the district, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab counted 47 estates, from which he was 'frequently besieged by *zemindars* [landholders] exhibiting samples of tea' that they had cultivated in 'their own fields' (Anon. 1866: xxix). The Lieutenant-Governor's enthusiasm notwithstanding, the parcelling of lands between colonisers and locals was tainted with inequalities: the planta-

tions belonging to locals amounted to a mere 399 acres in comparison with 2,723 acres held by Europeans, of which 'only about a fourth' was 'actually planted with tea' (Lyall 1874: 81).

Despite the disadvantages inherent to the colonial condition, within twenty years of its annexation the Kanga Valley Tea industry had acquired a place of pride among administrators, colonisers, and locals alike. Punjabi businessmen flocked to 'the only European colony in the centre of the Tea districts'[7] in Palampur, where they set up shops that targeted markets throughout the subcontinent, as well as in Afghanistan, Ladakh, and Central Asia (Minhas 1998: 162). The latter two markets were particularly interesting insofar as their unique demand for green tea required local experimentation with new strands in the plantation estates. Ladakhi merchants were soon invited to inspect samples from government plantations, which they estimated favourably at nearly triple the going rate at the time (Anon. 1866: xxxii). If the Ladakhi assessment promised to break new grounds by reaching Tibetan and Central Asian consumers, it also gave hope of expanding British influence across the Himalaya; an aim that was avidly pursued by the revenant Douglas Forsyth upon his return to the region in 1865.

'A Project of Imperial Importance': Palampur Fair, 1867-79

With the majestic Dhaula Dhar beckoning on the horizon, the Divisional Commissioner of Jalandhar was much delighted with the developments in Kangra since his departure some ten years earlier. Now in his late thirties, Forsyth had returned to the hills a somewhat changed man. Hardened by the events of 1857-58, in which he had played an active part on several fronts, the commissioner had become acutely wary of internal and external threats to empire. A vociferous proponent of the Forward School of British politics in India, Forsyth was earnestly focused on countering the expansion of Russian hegemony through Central Asia; that his appointment coincided with the conquest of 'Western Turkmenistan' did little to abate these concerns.[8]

In order to counter Tsarist expansionism, Forsyth turned to the tested means of trade and commerce, and to the Kangra Tea Industry in particular. London born-Robert Shaw (1839-79), the owner of the Khanyara plantation near the military cantonment of Dharamsala, emerged as a key facilitator of the commissioner’s plans and one that he was soon 'glad to be able to call' a 'friend' (Forsyth 1868-69: 200). Unable to join military service due to frail health—rheumatic fever contracted at childhood had left him with a defective heart that was a constant bother on his journeys—Shaw reached the valley in 1859 following a brief period of studies at Cambridge. By the time he

teamed up with Forsyth, Shaw was already intimately familiar with the hills through several exploratory trips that would have substantiated their growing friendship; and while the tea business may have helped pay the bills, Shaw's passions clearly laid in the exploration of the lands and cultures of the Himalaya.

When news of Ya'qub Beg's successful rebellion against China (in 1864) and subsequent establishment of an independent state in East Turkistan (present day-Xinjiang) reached India, the notion of breaching the Himalayan barrier into Central Asia transitioned from an improbable fantasy into an almost attainable reality.[9] Forsyth and Shaw proposed to accomplish this vision by founding a fair in British territory. Tailored to attract merchants from East Turkistan, the fair was to link British and Central Asian interests through trade and would ultimately lead to the opening a permanent residency in the capital of Kashgar. Shaw and Forsyth would emerge as a key facilitator in this initiative.

Expansionist minded-advocates of the Forward School welcomed the plan as a means for countering Russian influence in Asia, while the Kangra Valley planters could reap new profits from its untapped markets. This was especially important for cultivators of green tea, who sought to replace China as chief supplier of the product following Ya'qub Beg's severing of ties with the Qing dynasty (Shaw 1871: 17). The plantation and transport hub of Palampur emerged as a natural venue for the fair. Equipped with experience, prestige, and the support of local planters, Forsyth easily persuaded government that the initiative was 'a project of imperial importance' and within a couple of years he had gained final approval for the plan.

The inauguration of the 'Palampur Fair' on 28 October 1867 was a celebratory event that was held in the presence of prominent British officials, local leaders, and a large crowd of participants. Despite having won accolades in government circles, the fair disappointed the planters. The official returns on record indicate that the traders from Central Asia were primarily interested in fabrics, metal utensils, and 'European goods', while tea constituted a mere ten per cent of Indian sales. This was especially disconcerting for Shaw, who had devoted his estate to the exclusive cultivation of green tea with a view to pioneering the trade with East Turkistan. And although he could have also targeted nearer markets in Ladakh and Kashmir, where green tea was also in demand, it seems that Shaw's zeal for profit was secondary to his interest in actually reaching Kashgar himself. Thus, while the majority of planters continued to cast their net wide by investing in the

'safe' commodity of black tea,[10] the Kanyara planter took active measures to penetrate the trans-Himalayan market.

Emboldened by Forsyth's 'unbounded enthusiasm for the cause', Shaw headed a political convoy to Kashgar with the opening of the mountain passes the next spring, becoming the first Englishman to visit the region. Although not an official representative of government, Shaw hoped to persuade Ya'qub Beg to improve commercial ties with British India by packing a large quantity of green tea from his estate (Shaw 1871: 72).[11] A few months later Forsyth set off on a parallel mission to St. Petersburg (via Europe) with the blessings of the Viceroy, Lord Mayo (1869-72), a fellow supporter of the Forward School. The negotiations with the Tsar and 'his enlightened minister' resulted in an agreement that temporarily clarified the balance of imperial powers in Central Asia: the Russians would withdraw the forces that they had earlier dispatched beyond the Oxus and refrain from entering Afghanistan, thereby securing the independence of East Turkistan, which would remain free to trade with Russians and Britons alike. What Lord Mayo had rightly celebrated as a diplomatic success, also renewed the hopes of Forsyth, Shaw, and their associates regarding the fair at Palampur. The agreements had placed the British initiative on an equal footing with its competition, the grand fair at Nizhny Novgorod. The latter event was described by a Yarkandi merchant as a grander version of the 'Plampoor Fair' that lasted 'thirty days every year: ten days for cash transactions, ten days for barter, and ten days for dealings on credit' (Shaw 1871: 400).[12]

The efforts of Forsyth and Shaw seemed to bear fruit in the third fair (of 1869), which was timed to coincide with Lord Mayo's visit to Kangra. The event had attracted enormous crowds in what was destined to be the last surge in Central Asian trade at Palampur. Nearly half a million rupees' worth of Yarkandi merchandise was sold at the fair, the bulk of which 'was purchased by two very enterprising gentlemen, who had at once the local prosperity of Palumpore, and the trade of Central Asia, at heart' (Anon. 1872: 3). The substantial investments of the 'two gentlemen' are indicative of the tenuous state of trade relations with East Turkistan, which required the continual engagement of its benefactors were they to survive.

Forsyth attempted to build on the momentum of the third fair by leading two additional expeditions to Yarkand. His first visit took place in 1870, when he was requested to accompany an envoy that Ya'qub Beg had sent to enquire into relations with the British on his return journey. This visit provoked a Russian response that resulted in a treaty that was signed with Ya'qub Beg in 1872, in which a 2.5 per

cent tax limit was set on Russian goods and which allowed the Tsar's commercial agents (*caravanbashis*) to assume positioned in the various cities of East Turkistan. The British responded with a second, ambitious visit by Forsyth in 1873-74. Bearing the title of special envoy to the Queen, Forsyth was intended to equalise Britain's trading rights with those of Russia, and an agreement setting the same tax ceiling on goods coming from India was concluded in 1874 (Alder 1963: 41-4).[13]

Intelligence gathering efforts about the passage of goods and taxation in Kashmiri controlled-Ladakh paralleled these expeditions. The Punjab Government appointed Dr Henry Cayley EIC envoy to the Ladakhi capital of Leh in 1867. Having established a dispensary in Leh, Cayley conducted clandestine investigations with his patients alongside his practice of medicine (Bray 2015). The three summers he had spent there provided sufficient data for concluding a commercial treaty with the raja of Jammu and Kashmir that established a 'joint commissioner-ship' in Ladakh. Staffed by representatives of the Kashmiri and EIC authorities, the commissioners were to monitor the traffic in Yarkandi merchandise and to ensure that it was equitably taxed. Having already visited Leh in 1870, Shaw was well positioned to man the post—on Forsyth's recommendation—becoming the first joint commissioner of Ladakh in the summer of 1871 (Bray 2015: 88-91).

Although he was now an official employee of the political depart-ment of the British Indian government, Shaw also had a fair deal of private business to attend to. Apart from the plantation in Kanyara, this was a prime opportunity for advancing the interests of the Central Asian Trading Company that he had founded and was a co-partner in, and whose mission was to systematically explore the potential markets of Central Asia. An official visit to Kashgar in 1875 was consequently used to deliver consignments from the Kanyara plantation to business partners, while his partner in the venture became a permanent resident of Yarkand.[14]

These encouraging signs were quickly dispelled. During the same visit, Ya'qub Beg updated Shaw—in his capacity as government official—that he shall not be ratifying the terms of trade that Forsyth had negotiated in the preceding year. This would agree with the recent assessments of Ya'qub Beg's reign, which indicate he was a shrewd strategist who capably played Russians and Britons against each other rather than as a pawn in the 'Great Game' that has characterised standard Euro-centric writings on the topic (Kim 2004: 138-58). Regardless of these developments, within two years the trade with India had been reduced to nil, as the reconquest of Kashgar by the

Qing (in 1877) put an end to what few Yarkandi merchants who still dared traverse the mountains, reducing the international fair in Palampur to a strictly local event (Minhas 1998: 162).[15]

As the Palampur Fair receded into the shadows, the planters in Kangra were made to reconsider their future plans. Divested of the strategic importance they had held for policy makers; the plantation owners experienced a dramatic reduction in the financial support from government. The plummet from vanguards of empire to small time-capitalists on the fringes of British India left a bitter taste among the planters, who perceived the shift in policy as abandonment. The plantations and estates were gradually sold off to businessmen and politically dominant families in the region and their produce sensibly directed to more easily accessible markets than Central Asia.[16] By the turn of the century, a second generation-planter in Baijnath would pronounce the 'golden age of Douglas Forsyth' a relic of the past, and the later history of the fair that he had labored hard to establish as having 'dwindled down to a drunken, drumming, dancing crowd of ragged *Guddi*s [shepherds], and then died away altogether' (Fitzgerald 1902: 23, 25).[17] If the declining fortunes of Palamur Fair can be plausibly attributed to geopolitical shifts in the Asian Highlands, the details of these changes and their effects on the Kangra Tea Industry are revealing of the multiple processes that affected the Himalayan transition to modernity in the era of the Great Game.

Appraising the Fair and its failure

There are several reasons for the Palampur Fair's collapse that may be, for heuristic purposes, divided between the broad fields of geography, politics and commerce. As a rule, the bulk of Central Asian trade with India was conducted along the traditional high road via Afghanistan, Balkh, and Bukhara. In promoting the arduous route to Kashgar from Palampur via Leh, Forsyth was responding to the contingencies of international politics. By the 1860s, Russia was already firmly entrenched in West Turkistan, which was aptly described by a contemporary as 'Russian Turkistan'. With contiguous tracts leading all across Central Asia into the Russian heartland (Nizhny Novgorod), the trade with West Turkistan offered Kashgar and its traders' easy access to European goods and markets through the well-trodden trails of the Silk Road (Murchison 1870: 315). By way of contrast, the road to Palampur consisted of a series of daunting passes that limited the Yarkandi merchants to bi-annual visits at best. It is no wonder then, that the route came to be recognised as 'the worst trade route in the whole

wide world' (Keay 2000: 262) soon after the fair in Palampur had shut down.

The insistent attempts at 'breaching' these markets also failed to recognise the interests of East Turkistan society. The Kirghiz population, for one, remains largely pastoral-nomadic and thus primarily geared towards securing pasturelands for grazing. The exchange of commodities has consequently been limited to specialist communities and selected families whose networks span the Himalayan divide (Rizvi 1999). The British would have been aware of these practices from their experience in other parts of the Himalaya. For example, the trade between the sparsely inhabited frontier of the Rajput kingdom of Bashahr (nowadays in Himachal Pradesh, India) and West Tibet during the nineteenth century was maintained by some 400 Kinnauri merchants, who amounted to less than one per cent of the state's overall population (Kanwar 1999: 73).

The colonial records' stress on trade, reinforced as it was by proponents of the Forward School, ended up distorting the socio-political realities of life on the steppe, which revolved around the pressing concern of acquiring pasture lands. The spilling of the rivalry between Hunza and Kirghiz tribesmen over these territories into the mercantile realm was consequently presented as the 'raids' of frontier savages over civilised 'trading convoys.'[18] The rising volume of trade that reached India via the Ladakh thus concerned but a small segment of Ya'qub Beg's subjects and would partly explain the continual volatility of the Palamur Fair during the years of its existence (Shaw 1871: 3).

The trajectory of the Kangra Tea industry similarly illustrates the fair's incompatibility with existing trade patterns. The attempts at penetrating Central Asia through the selling of green tea remained limited to Shaw, whereas the remainder of planters cultivated black and blended varieties to meet unprecedented demands for the product across the globe. Easily accessible through the railhead at Jalandhar, the expanding rail network of India delivered Kangra grown-tea to various markets in and beyond the subcontinent. The trains would have also benefited the odd planters who actually cultivated green tea for sale in the markets of Afghanistan, Kashmir (and Ladakh), and West Turkistan by forwarding their goods to intermediary traders in Amritsar. Recalling that the transport of goods from the valley to the road- and railheads in the Punjab was free, the planters would have surely preferred these to the troublesome trail blazed by Shaw.

In terms of profitability, the premise that guided Shaw in his venture, according to which East Turkistan was critically lacking in green tea as a result of its severed ties with China, proved to be poorly

grounded. According to Russian archival sources, the bulk of tea selling establishments in nineteenth century Bukhara and Samarkhand were run by Indians who sold 'Bombay Tea', an appellation for green tea that was shipped from China to Bombay and then carried overland via Afghanistan (Levi 2002: 51). It follows that the extensive trade that existed between East and West Turkistan would have ensured a continuous supply of Chinese green tea regardless of Kashgaria's political relations with the Qing. That the network of merchants and interlocutors that managed the trade in 'Bombay Tea' actually succeeded in reaping profits despite the circuitous route of their commodities is testimony to the robustness of global capitalism in the 1860s. The chances of competing with such a substantiated network were thus fairly slim and strongly resonant with the British failure in competing with China over the Tibetan market (Booz 2011).

Shortly after Shaw withdrew from the valley, the production of green tea in Kangra was brought to a halt. By 1892 the plantations were devoted to the exclusive production of black and blended varieties that were sold in near equal measure to the London and Calcutta markets (Minhas 1998: 143). A more sober appraisal of the place of Kangra Tea in the wider field of Indian tea production reveals it was a far cry from the inflated accounts of its proponents in the Forward School. While the Kangra estates may have loomed over similar plantations in the region in terms of size, quality, and productivity, these achievements were miniscule in comparison with the mammoth expansion of the industry in coeval Assam and Darjeeling. During the 1880s, Kangra produced twice the quantity of tea than the plantations in Garhwal and Kumaon had, but only a thirtieth of the output of Darjeeling and Assam, where estates fitted for mass production were apace of rising demands in Britain, America, and Australia (Clarke 1881; Sharma 2011). The rhetoric that sought to market Kangra as the future of Indian tea is thus best understood as a local success story rather than as an integral part of the development of Indian Tea.

The obstacles placed by geophysics and economics were compounded by the political subordination of Ladakh to Jammu and Kashmir. Maharaja Ranbir Singh (1856-85) was renowned for his fierce protection of autonomy. Having opposed the appointment of a British Resident in Srinagar for most of his reign—an appointee could only be sent when the maharaja had grown infirm—the ruler had little to gain from British competition in trade (Rai 2004: 80-127). The border between Kashgaria and Ladakh, wrote an alarmed Forsyth, had indeed enabled the maharaja to 'extend his influence, and represent himself, and not the British Government, as the great power' in dealings with Ya'qub Beg.[19] The result were hefty levies on transit duties for Yarkandi mer-

chants passing through Ladakh. As iterated above, this conflict was resolved after lengthy negotiations that culminated in the establishment of a joint commissionership for the Kahsmiri and British authorities in Ladakh, whose first representative was Robert Shaw.[20]

Far from laying the issue to rest, the agreement was reciprocated by the maharaja's cultivation of ties with political leaders along the Palampur-Leh route well inside British territory. The lord (*thakur*) of Lahaul, whose territories connected the valley of Kullu with Ladakh, was granted financial assistance with the aim of tapping into the rising volume of trade in his territories. When Forsyth discovered the thakur had been sending 'money and iron' as tribute to Kashmir, he immediately demanded an increase in government support to the Lahauli dependant so as to 'to remove him from all temptation' of collaborating with Kashmir.[21] The undermining of British authority aside, this motion would have also been prompted by the centrality of Lahauli merchants in the regional cycle of economic activities.

The Lahauli traders used to dominate the Dasara in Kullu in September-October, from where they would proceed to the Lavi Fair in Bashahr in November (Kanwar 1999: 64). The fair in Palampur was timed to begin ten days after Dasara in order to allow the Lahauli traders sufficient time to reach Palampur. The returns from the first fair indicate that some Lahauli traders had indeed broken their habitual cycle as nearly half the goods sold consisted of grain and *gram* flour, products traditionally bought by Lahauli and Spiti traders in return for their woolens, drugs and ponies (Anon. 1864: xvii). The enlistment of the thakur's son as a member of the official expedition of 1873-74 was similarly aimed at deepening the ties between Lahauli merchants and their counterparts in East Turkistan.

Successful as the British intervention in Lahaul may have been, it ultimately targeted only one of numerous routes that connected the Western Himalaya with Central Asia. The strategic location of the kingdom of Jammu and Kashmir at the crossroads of a large number of these routes, the vastness of its dominions, and the integration of its diverse regional components through nodal partners endowed it with advantages that put the Palampur Fair to shame. For one, a substantial network of Kashmiri merchants had already been established in the markets towns of East Turkistan for at least half a century before the 'gentlemen capitalists' of Kangra attempted to breach the frontier. The authorities in Srinagar offered significant concessions to merchants in state service to advance a profitable trade in East Turkistan pashmina wool that was converted into shawls by Kashmiri looms. The sate sponsored-traders bought the much-valued pashmina (considered

superior even to that of West Tibet) from compatriots who had settled in Kashgaria in earlier decades to considerable profit for all parties.[22] The sheer breadth of this trade network suggests an exceedingly better grasp of regional opportunities and customs than the mono-pathed route to Palampur.[23]

The monopolisation of trade by the state that characterised both British and Kashmiri authorities reveals the fallacies behind the imperialism of free trade. Under the guise of 'opening' new arenas to commercial exchange, the technological and fiscal advantages of Britain had accustomed its servants to triumph. The Palampur Fair is interesting for demonstrating the limits of these means. A comparison of the trade statistics of British India with Yarkand and with Jammu and Kashmir is instructive in this regard. In the final year of the fair, the total sum of Yarkandi imports and exports was valued at 25,000 pounds (or 250,000 rupees), while the exchanges between Jammu and Kashmir and British India were set at 700,000 pounds (or 7 million rupees), nearly thirty times the volume of Central Asian goods traded in Palampur.[24] With extensive contiguous borders reaching into markets throughout Asia and with a fiercely independent ruler at its head, Jammu and Kashmir had thwarted the imperial project to reap handsome profits and sustain its supreme position in trans-Himalayan trade; a position that no sporadic undermining, not even the Palampur Fair, could upset.

Conclusion

British colonisation changed the Kangra Valley landscape. Bridges, roads, tea gardens and the township of Palampur developed with surprising speed during the first decades of British rule, granting novel opportunities for colonisers, Punjabis, and locals. By the 1860s, these developments were incorporated into an imperial manoeuvre that sought to expand British influence into Central Asia. With an ambitious 'imperial project' at its core, the tea gardens of the hills briefly shone bright through the stubborn efforts of 'two enterprising gentlemen', only to succumb to the exigencies of global capital trends and regional geopolitics a decade later. The failure of Palampur Fair is revealing of the limits of British imperialism in High Asia. The constraints of geography, politics and commercial expediency dashed the hopes of its visionary founders, whose dealings reveal a zealous ambition that might just have come in the way of prudence.

By the late 1870s, the animating spirits of Palampur Fair had gone their separate ways. Forsyth returned to England in 1876, where he made an unsuccessful attempt at politics only to become the chairman

of an Indian railway company until his death in 1886. Shaw remained with the political department and was appointed resident at Mandalay in 1878, where he unexpectedly passed away the following year.[25]

Although they had embarked on seemingly different careers, the two remained extremely attached to the Kangra Valley and Central Asian affairs throughout their lives. The findings of their expeditions were published in books and journals that offered Europeans insights into largely unexplored territories, the majority appearing in publications of the Royal Geographic Society and Royal Asiatic Society. Forsyth had also published a short guide entitled *Trade routes between northern India and Central Asia* at some point in the 1860s, whereas Shaw wrote a number of treatises on Central Asian languages. An account of their joint explorations during the expedition of 1870 appeared as a book during their lifetime (Henderson & Hume 1873).

After his death, the wife and daughters of Douglas Forsyth installed a memorial plaque in the church he had helped found in Palampur 'to record his great affection for this spot' (Forsyth 1887: 282). Robert Shaw's passion for the cultures and languages of Central Asia accompanied him until his last days in Burma, where his notes and studies occupied an entire chamber in the British residency.[26] Their legacy of exploration was sustained by Shaw's nephew, Sir Francis Younghusband, who is primarily remembered in connection with the British invasion of Tibet in 1903-04, but perhaps no less importantly, in the serene panoramas of tea plantations that still beckon visitors to Kangra today.

Endnotes

[1] My thanks to the University of Rome (La Sapienza) for permission to use Moran (2009) as the kernel to this expanded and updated paper. Additional thanks to John Bray and Elena di Rossi Filibeck for facilitating contacts, and for generous sharing of sources.

[2] On the role of tea in reconfiguring Assam under the British, see Sharma (2011).

[3] Paske to Coxe, 8 July 1860 (referencing purchased made in the 1850s), cited in Anon (1869: 3). On the tensions between landholders, colonisers, and government representatives over individual and communally owned ("waste") lands, see Lyall (1874: 80-2).

[4] National Archives of India (NAI), Foreign Department Proceedings, General A, No. 5, January 1868, "Honb'le Mr. Taylor's account of a tour from Simla to Umritsur and Lahore," (hereafter *Taylor account*) p. 6.

[5] Ibid.

[6] The subsequent attempts of government at regulating begar were met with resistance on the part of the colonisers, who deemed them 'unnecessary and dangerous to all parties employing large numbers of coolies, such as the PWD [Public Works Department] and the planters' (Anon 1872: 16).

[7] Forsyth to Miller, 6 May 1867, cited in Anon (1864: vi).

[8] On the Forward School's policies in the region see Alder (1963) and Warikoo (1989); for an excellent complementary outline of Russian engagements on the Chinese borderland, see Morrison (2019). For captivating summaries of British and Indian adventurers in nineteenth century-High Asia, see Hopkirk (1990), Keay (2000), and Waller (1990).

[9] On Ya'qub Beg in Kashgar, see Kim (2004).

[10] Out of seventeen officially recognised plantations—eleven in Kangra and six in Kullu—green tea was only cultivated in one other estate apart from Shaw's, and that too alongside the black variety (Anon 1869: 27).

[11] On Shaw's journey in the context of Russio-British rivalry in Central Asia, see Keay (2000: 212-62).

[12] Forsyth was personally familiar with the fair at Nizhny Novgorod from a visit in 1864; Forsyth to Miller, 12 November 1867, cited in Anon (1864: xi).

[13] The agreements are reproduced in Kim (2004: 187-93).

[14] Shaw and his partner, Andrew Dalgeish, remain the only Europeans to have traversed the Himalaya into Xinjiang as private traders in the entire history of British India. Dalgeish remained in Yarkand as their company's agent, then liquidator, and ultimately set up his own business. He was assassinated in his tent in the Karakoram Mountains in 1888. For a fascinating narrative of these events, see Keay (2000: 259-62).

[15] The effects of the political change in Kashgar could only fully be gauged in 1879, since the distance to Palampur dictated a bi-annual cycle for visits by Central Asian merchants.

[16] The great earthquake of Kangra in 1905 saw the last of the European owned plantations transfer to Indian hands, see Minhas (1998: 122-5).

[17] Fitzgerald's father was co-owner of the Baijnath Tea Estate near Palampur; the 'guddis' (*gaddi*s) are pastoral nomads who migrate between lands in the Kangra Valley and the mountains of Bara Banghal to its north.

[18] The long-term effects of the colonial emphasis on trade are apparent among today's Hunza, who deny the historical evidence for their ancestry in pastoral-nomad tribes to claim provenance with 'caravan traders' (Hussain 2006). On contemporary Kirghiz society, consult Shahrani (2002); on the latter's tributary relations with Qing China, see di Cosmo (2003).

[19] Extract from Forsyth's letter in *Taylor account*, p. 5.

[20] For informative discussions of these negotiations Warikoo (1989: 134-50). For a detailed investigation of the interests that fueled them, see Rizvi (1999: 182-208).

[21] Forsyth to Thornton, 14 September 1866, p. 5, and Annex in Thornton to Wyllie, 10 January 1867, p. 6 in "Copy of correspondence between the Secretary of State for *India* and the Governor General in Council, relating to the Appointment of a COMMERCIAL AGENT in *Ladakh*, and to his Proceedings there," UK House of Commons Parliamentary Paper, Command no. 147. My thanks to John Bray for sharing his copy of this source.

[22] A decline in European demand for Kashmiri shawls after 1870 reduced the importance of Kashmiri traders in East Turkistan, whose progeny has since abandoned long distance-trade; see Rizvi (1999: 182-208) and (Rai 2004: 153).

[23] The incapacity of the Palampur Fair's advocates to engage in monetary dealings 'on any excessive scale' with the Yarkandi merchants who visited the site is telling of the gap between imperial ambition and local knowledge, as the Yarkandis strongly preferred barter; see the report on the Kangra tea industry of 1872 by Edward Paske, the EIC's former broker of land acquisitions in Kangra, as quoted in Minhas (1998: 141).

[24] The trade between Ladakh and British India for the same year was estimated at 17,000 pounds (Clarke 1881: 554-7).

[25] Forsyth was sent to Burma in 1875 to discuss political control of the Kayin State in the southeastern part of the country with the king. Given the friendship between the two, it is not unlikely that Forsyth had assisted in Shaw's subsequent nomination to the region.

[26] IOR Mss Eur F197/50, Phayre to Younghusband, 20 July 1879, fo. 10.

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