

ANTHROPOLOGY OF TIBET AND THE HIMALAYA

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HIMALAYAN FRONTIER TRADE: NEWAR DIASPORA MERCHANTS AND BUDDHISM

Todd T. Lewis

Introduction

One of my long-standing interests in Himalayan anthropology has been to develop an understanding of the region as a frontier zone penetrated by peoples and cultures through a variety of interlocking processes. This approach seeks insight from comparative case studies to develop a theoretical language for analysing regional ethnohistory. I was drawn toward this inter-disciplinary endeavor through my fieldwork among Newar Buddhists of Kathmandu, whose kinship, mercantile, and religious ties spanned Nepal's mid-hills, southward to Patna, Calcutta, and Sri Lanka, east to Burma, north-east to Bhutan, Lhasa, and even Beijing, and westward as far as Ladakh. This paper first sets forth some basic parameters of frontier theory and suggests comparisons with frontier processes in South-east Asia and North/South America. Despite the fact that this approach to the Himalayas requires a complex equation, I suggest that working out the key structural variables will help delineate underlying patterns of ethnic settlement, the logic of trade networks and historical change, and reveal the processes of socio-cultural adaptation. Part 2 seeks to substantiate this position by examining the Newar trade diaspora, utilising the frontier paradigm to understand this ethnic group's migration and the specific case studies of Chainpur (eastern Nepal) and Lhasa. The conclusion applies these findings to speculation on the history of Buddhism in frontier zones.

1. Theoretical summation: defining the Himalayas as a frontier

1.1. Frontiers

The Himalayan region can be compared not only to other high altitude zones but also to other frontiers. The often mind-boggling complexity of Himalayan cultures and peoples stems from the mountainous region being a *dual frontier*, a zone of Indo-Tibetan intersection,¹ linked to multi-centric core or hearth zones north and south, and with Tibetan civilisation in its formative history (pre-1200) shaped by Indic culture. Cultural geographers stress that micro-regional variability characterises frontier zones, although a set of common qualities can also be discerned (Miller and Steffen 1977).

First, definitions. Civilisations have limits to their optimal growth, and the territories beyond the zone of the centre's full control are termed the **periphery**. The **frontier** is the outer periphery, where the predominant systems of production and rule in the core area(s) have not been fully extended (Lattimore 1962). Edmund Leach points out that traditions of the culture hearth readily transplant beyond political boundaries, and so he defines the frontier as a dynamic border zone through which cultures interpenetrate:

The whole of «Burma» is a frontier region continuously subjected to influences from both India and China and so also the frontiers which separated the petty political units within «Burma» were not clearly defined

lines but zones of mutual interest. The political entities in question had interpenetrating political systems, but they were not separate countries inhabited by distinct populations. This concept of a frontier as a border zone through which cultures interpenetrate in a dynamic manner ... needs to be distinguished clearly from the precise MacMahon lines of modern political geography (Leach 1961:50).

Leach's comparative framework is of special importance to Himalayan scholars because it demonstrates a close ethnohistorical parallel: *both* the Himalayas *and* highland South-east Asia were frontiers shaped by independent hill peoples resisting or making accommodations with expansive lowland centres that introduced intensive rice cultivation and Indic traditions of state organisation/ideology, Buddhist monasticism, Indic deities, and Brahman ritualists.

1.2. Ecology

Ecological processes are fundamental to understanding frontier dynamics. Here, American historian William Cronon's *Changes in the land* is particularly germane since the Himalayan frontier, like North America, was affected by the dialectic between already-settled «tribal» peoples interacting with colonisers who introduced more intensive agricultural-pastoral subsistence systems, including imported technologies, that transformed local ecosystems.

Our analysis of ecological change must inevitably focus on differences between the human communities that existed on opposite sides: differences in political organisation, in systems of production, and in human relationships with the natural world. The shift from Indian to English dominance in New England saw the replacement of an earlier village system of shifting agriculture and hunter-gatherer activities by an agriculture which raised crops and domesticated animals in household production units that were contained within fixed property boundaries and linked with commercial markets (Cronon 1983: 161-2).

This tendency of peoples to settle and subsist in consistent patterns of ecological adaptation (Guillet 1983; Iijima 1964) is the basis for the *niche theory* of human settlement history that was long ago outlined by Frederik Barth for the North-west Himalayas (1956: 1088; Barth 1969).² Thus, resulting *migration corridors* must be linked to geography, to the trade networks and the social history of polities as they formed, as these factors shaped the actual possibilities of ethnic group settlement, cultural diffusion, and regional history (Fried 1952; Messerschmidt 1982).

1.3. Galactic Polities across Frontiers

The logic of large pan-regional networks affected frontier history, as such resource connections (material and personnel) to core zones provided the bases of a civilisation's expansion in many spheres. S.J. Tambiah has used the term «galactic polity» to characterise the formation pattern of «Indianised states» of peninsular and eastern South Asia (1976: 102-131): an ordered set of geo-political relationships dominated by a capital centre to which are

bound a network of sub-centres which themselves replicate the larger order. These planetary sub-systems extend the galactic polity of a state down to three or more levels of articulation. Tambiah underlines the impermanence of Indic states by emphasising the regularity of systemic «pulsations», i.e. the waves of change that moved across the network with the rising and falling of dominant centres (Tambiah 1977). Although the Himalayan frontier's extreme terrain and lower demographic thresholds makes the galactic polity more dispersed and less developed than the classical ideal, it still seems useful for investigating the ethnohistory of the region in pre-Shah times (Stiller 1973).

1.4. Religious Institutions across frontiers

Suitably adapted to the terrain and specific variables, the galactic polity helps map the expansion pattern of Buddhist and Hindu institutions in their colonisation of new territories (Tambiah 1976: 174). Indic pan-Himalayan expansion and the settlement of Brahmans, Sannyasins, and Buddhist monks (B. Miller 1960; R. Miller 1962) across the region's inner frontiers occurred on the basis of such networks. In certain polities, we know that it was through royal land grants that Brahmans, *vihāras*, *aśramas*, *mathas* became new landlords and allies of rulers extending their kingdoms into frontier regions (Riccardi 1979). Patronage and loyalty to these institutions defined «civilised» status and articulated the character of ethnic group boundaries. In the prominent central places (Kashmir, Nepal Valley, Assam), Himalayan history thus conforms to the ancient Indic pattern (Kosambi 1965; Ray 1986).

Here I must underline that Indic religions - and, in my view, all world religions - must be seen *inter alia* as agents of conversion suited to the reality of frontier interactions (cf. I.M. Lewis 1980: 4-98; Bowden 1982; Hutchinson 1987). Doctrinally, Indic Buddhism and Hinduism represent powerful ideological formulations of spiritual conquest. Texts recount founders converting local deities, and saints conquering indigenous ritualists and demons. Reinstating the vanquished supernaturals into the pantheon of protectors is a common theme in the popular literature of both traditions. Such doctrinal and mythic assertions are both metaphors of and prescriptions for the «civilising» transformations that the missionary institutions of Buddhism and Hinduism established across frontiers (Falk 1973).³

Thus, far from capitals and the large religious institutional centres, and far from the grand patrons and ceremonial/scholastic centres where the greatest masters resided, religious traditions in periphery settlements made unique accommodations, often quite anomalous to the orthodoxy of the hearth centres.⁴ The logic of Himalayan frontier adaptation led Parbatiyā Brahmans, Tamang lamas, and Newar *bhiksus* to modify core traditions in their settlements as classical orthodoxy and orthopraxy were compromised with the needs for survival. Lacking the prestige and spiritual renown of core area saints and scholars, religious institutions on the periphery only rarely received support from the core's great rulers and patrons. Across the polities of the Himalayan frontier, it was the diaspora merchants who exerted great influence on regional economic, religious, and political evolution.

1.5. Middlemen and diaspora traders

Peoples from the hearth zones possessing core kin/patron connections and cultural traditions became *middlemen*, exploiting their dual connections. This is evident in two (often overlapping) elemental areas in the Himalayas: **merchandisers**, carrying in goods from distant sites that were sought for their advanced technology (iron, ceramic, etc.), luxury, or religious value; and **lenders**, holding excess gold/silver/money, for borrowing at interest. (This was a ready vehicle for acquiring local land through loan defaults.) The need for **artisans** also sustained semi-nomadic communities of diaspora blacksmiths and potters. In the modern era, entrepreneuring **capitalists** seeking labour and **functionaries** with access to state institutions (such as the army or the courts) were yet other modes of the diaspora middleman. Thus, Himalayan migration responded to niches, to use the proper ecological term, where different societies of middlemen could exploit their intermediary positions.

Lucrative diaspora trade networks, mercantile/entrepreneuring webs of import/export trade, were often in the hands of single ethnic groups with their own quite distant core zones. This mode of livelihood, relying on business acumen, capital, family partners stationed in strategic venues, and diplomatic skills, were a pervasive global phenomenon (Curtin 1984). In the Himalayas, a wide variety of diaspora trade networks existed. Prominent Kashmiri, Bengali, Marwari and Tibetan traders figure prominently in Nepal's history alongside Nepalese traders of Newar, Thakali, Sherpa and Manangi ethnic backgrounds (Fürer-Haimendorf 1976). In 1685, there was even a Eurasian Armenian trade network linked through the region into Lhasa (Khachikian 1966).

2. The Newar diaspora

The civilisation with its roots in the Kathmandu Valley has for at least 1500 years dominated a territory extending beyond its immediate culture hearth zone. An elevated malaria-free valley roughly twenty miles in diameter, pre-modern Nepal was the most attractive and productive settlement in the region due to its fertile soil, reliable rains, pleasant climate, and trade location. Itself a frontier «satellite» which has absorbed many influences from India⁵ and, to a lesser extent, Tibet, the Nepal Valley always retained its political independence from distant empires. The Kathmandu Valley's enduring autonomy and cultural vitality is shown in the survival of a unique Tibeto-Burman language; Newari (Genetti 1988).

By the Licchavi era (A.D. 400-800), it is clear that a core civilisation existing in the Kathmandu Valley was Indicised to the extent of its rulers making Sanskrit inscriptions to record local proclamations. Hindu, Buddhist, and even Jain traditions were imported, and by the Gupta era «Nepal» was well known in the Gangetic plains (Riccardi 1979; Slusser 1982). While we now have basic information about early Nepal's society and culture from these records, there are only scant references to the limits of Licchavi rule. This early civilisation extended to the Banepa Valley immediately to the east and may have reached Nuwakot (D. Bajracarya and Shrestha 1976). It is likely that there were traders centred in the Valley who also established relationships with small settlements on the connecting Indo-Tibetan trade routes - several

Licchavi inscriptions mention «caravan traders» (Locke 1985: 307) - but to date no records of these sites have been discovered. Routes through the central Himalayas are mentioned in Sanskrit pilgrimage guides of this era (Bhardwaj 1973) and these support the notion that there have been regular avenues of human passage across the central Himalayas from the ancient period onward.

In the early Malla period (1100-1480), evidence of Newar expansion emerges, especially for Dolakha. Across the mid-hills, territory was carved up among hundreds of petty states, with local ruling elites exercising control over subsistence farmers and pastoralists through in-kind taxes, trade tolls, and military coercion (Stiller 1973). Trade routes to Tibet via Humla, Mustang, Kyirong, Khasa, and Wallangchung channeled north-south relations. Across the mid-hills, a dominant trade artery passed from Jumla to Pokhara, to Nuwakot, to Kathmandu; and from there to Dhulikhel, Dolakha, Bhojpur, Ilam, and Darjeeling (Hodgson 1848).⁶ Even before the Shahs, the Kathmandu Valley's metalworkers, artists, weavers, musk/gold/silver traders were linked by middlemen - both Newar and others - to the greater regional economic system that radiated across the hill hinterlands, India, and Tibet (Clarke 1983).

The eventual conquest of the Nepal Valley by Prithivi Narayan Shah of Gorkha (1769) was a landmark event that altered the course of Himalayan history (English 1985). Most of the former regional polities shifted in response to the new state's many actions directed at unifying a single nation: with Kathmandu now at the galactic centre governing a broad territory, this led to unprecedented changes (Burghart 1984). Setting definitive modern borders and establishing Nepal's national bureaucracies in law, military, tariffs, etc. caused populations across the hills to reorganise themselves, sometimes in new configurations and under new names, and fundamentally to redefine themselves so as to prosper (Levine 1987). Analysis of this era in terms of the Nepal state as a dual frontier state underlines the fact of relations shifting across the region, complicated by the changes in the Tibetan polities to the north and with the transition from Mughal to British imperial dominance to the south (Embree 1977).

It was natural that the conquering Shah rulers recruited individuals from the Kathmandu Valley to perform the tasks necessary for national integration. Newar society was known for its literate elite, successful businessmen, talented artists, and skilled agriculturalists. For the Newars in the Valley, the Shah conquest presented opportunities for exploiting their skills in each of these spheres. Thus, many Newars migrated across the new Nepali empire: some left under contract with the state to supervise government mining, minting, weaving, and other types of production (English 1985). In the first decades of Shah rule, Newars were close allies in meeting the rulers' ongoing, practical need to supply military garrisons (Stiller 1973). Merchants also went out to pursue trade opportunities along the administrative networks being created by the new state's organisation (Mikesell and Shrestha 1990).

For venturesome Newar entrepreneurs, new economic niches emerged, alliances developed, and settlements grew across the frontier zones. Success fuelled continued Newar migration, coalescing in their dominance in major towns throughout mid-montane Nepal. Migration corridors developed

between specific Valley sub-communities and distant satellite towns as all-Newar and non-Newar client-patron relations developed. Allied with the state's extensions across the hills in all domains but soldiering, and aware of new state laws and procedures, Newars acquired land and created new settlements that partially replicated their core society and its traditions. Entrepreneurship, money-lending, and acting as craftsman/artisan collectives that provided valued household goods, many Newars exploited the possibilities created in the wholly new world of the Shah state. Some, including prominent Newar politicians of recent decades, became community leaders; others mercilessly exploited local people (Mikesell 1988). There were still other Newar niches, and Newar ethnicity in these sites is complicated yet again by many men intermarrying with non-Newar women.

For many, this migration was permanent and many contemporary descendants no longer retain relations with kin in the Valley. Newar migration continues until the present: the 1981 census shows that roughly 40 per cent of those who identify themselves as «Newar» live outside the Kathmandu Valley proper. (For a more detailed demographic overview of the Newar diaspora, see Lewis and Shakya 1988.)

If a bazaar in the Nepalese mid-hills is significant, Newar trading families will likely be there. Throughout Nepal, Newars have been active in pursuing the business opportunities that have unfolded concomitant with economic modernisation. Modern Newar diaspora settlements vary greatly, each seemingly in its own geographical and historical niche. The development of diaspora Newar settlements conformed to the logic of trade and state organisation in each district: merchants adapted to the trade arteries that have evolved by positioning themselves at centres suitable for dominating the economic relations of the rural hinterland (Gellner 1986; Quigley 1985). «Marketing communities» (Skinner 1964) among Newar producers, middlemen, and rural consumers evolved across the middle hills.

Each Newar diaspora town also represents a sample of the Kathmandu Valley's core culture, reflecting the migrants' places of origin and the settlers' historical adaptations in the locality. Newars transplanted both the Hindu and Buddhist religions, caste rituals, architectural styles, distinctive festivals, and a host of dialects (Genetti 1988; Shakya n.d.). Ties with the core area have been preserved in many domains, especially in marriage alliances, initiations of their Buddhist *samgha* (individuals of the Śākya and Vajrācārya castes), and in pilgrimage choices.

Among diaspora Newars, Hindu and Buddhist identities correlate with different patterns of assimilation with other ethnic groups. Recent research (Lewis and Shakya 1988) indicates that Hindu Newars have been much more absorbed into their satellite societies: this can be observed in the rate of intermarriage, in the use of spoken Nepali versus Newari, and in their domestic religious observances. Whereas Parbatīyā Brahmins are perfectly suitable serving as *pūjāris* for Hindu Newars - there are few Newar Brahmins in the hearth zone and they have rarely moved to the hills - there are no suitable non-Newar Buddhist ritualists. Many members of the Newar Mahāyāna *samgha*, including *vajrācārya* priests, have migrated to major settlements.

In places, Newar Buddhists have also lost their language and sometimes intermarried, but by retaining their Buddhist culture most have held together a stronger Newar self-identity. Śākya and Vajrācāryas have been especially concerned to sustain their core zone religious initiation lineages, transplant their religious institutions and sacred artwork, and keep Bodhisattva cult connections with the Kathmandu Valley. As a result, there is now a core-satellite «web of Newar Buddhist *vihāras*» across the mid-hills of Nepal. There is one additional twist in this complex pattern: these Buddhist networks in recent decades have been tapped to disseminate Theravāda Buddhism into the hills, a movement from Burma and Sri Lanka via Kathmandu (Kloppenbergs 1977; Lewis 1984: 494-513) that has been spread by diaspora Newars.

Thus, following the logic of commerce created and protected by state formation, diaspora Newars expanded the geographic spread of their population and technologies; via the same networks, they have exported their cultural traditions as well, especially Buddhism. Before discussing the implications of this ethno-religious pattern of expansion, two Newar case studies provide a sense of the complex richness such groups created in Himalayan history.

Case Study 1: Chainpur

The history of this ridgetop settlement, recounted in an oral account published elsewhere (Lewis and Shakya 1988), is a paradigmatic case study in the retreat of the Tibetan frontier due to the extension of the modern state after 1769: a general of the Gurkha state used treachery to ambush a small contingent of Tibetan guards at their southernmost toll stop. Where the current bazaar now stands, Hindu deities and a resthouse were installed to celebrate the general's success. After this conquest, Newars migrated from the Kathmandu Valley to establish a metal-working community that found a lucrative economic niche supplying the hinterlands with kitchen products and worked silver and gold jewelry. Import-export traders were also part of this settlement. As in Taksar-Bhojpur to the southwest, they had migrated mainly from Patan. This metalwork production is still lucrative today, and during waking hours the town resonates with the tap-tap of hammers on copper.

With the emergence of the modern state, the town prospered and expanded due to the establishment of the district centre and a flourishing weekly *hāt bazār*. Offices and health care institutions developed a more diversified economy, while Newars also imported photography services and new consumer electronic goods. The neat flagstone streets bespeak this town's general prosperity. But when the district centre was shifted to Khandbari, the Chainpur economy receded considerably, underlining the linkage between Newar prosperity and the extension of the state.

In 1987, the town had a modest cultural inventory of two Buddhist *vihāras*, one *caitya*, a temple to Siddha Kālī outside the town limits, and a number of free-standing temples to Bhimsen, Kṛṣṇa, and Viṣṇu. Theravāda Buddhists have also established a small *vihāra* in the lower west sector of town and this group is by far the most active religious organisation in Chainpur. The Buddhist Newars here must call the closest Vajrācārya in Khandbari (a day's walk) for special rites, since there is no local lineage; Newar Hindus rely on Parbatīyā Brahmins.



Plate 1: Hanuman Dhoka marker, Chainpur Bazaar

An interesting Chainpur monument is a crudely carved marker (shown in plate 1) noting the distance to Kathmandu's Hanuman Dhoka. This is a graphic, emic expression of the early modern state's own core-periphery geographical definition. Since 1986, Chainpur's relationship with the centre in Kathmandu, in addition to the *vihāras* and monks of Theravāda Buddhism, is evident in the CHAINPUR BRASS shop located on Durbar Marg, on the main avenue of five star tourism in Kathmandu.

Case study 2: Newars in Lhasa

Since antiquity, Valley merchants were well situated to control the flow of Indo-Tibetan trade goods going by caravan in both directions. From the Malla era onward, taxes on trade were a major source of revenue for the Newar kings (Sen 1971). One decisive component in the Shah conquest of the Newars was Prithivi Narayan's success at cutting off the flow of trade through Kathmandu, depriving the Malla kings of revenue and undermining the Newar traders' support of their own government (Regmi 1971). Gorkhali rulers strongly supported Newar trading with Tibet (Updety 1980).

The British Younghusband Expedition opened up the shorter (and therefore superior) trade route to Tibet through Kalimpong, and by 1908 Newar traders had lost their advantaged position in the Lhasa trade, though many moved their operations eastward - Darjeeling and Calcutta - to carry on business. They were also involved with minting the money of Tibet, a very lucra-

tive business which dates back to as early as the mid-sixteenth century (Regmi 1971; Rhodes 1980), and dominated the introduction of commercial photography. (See plate 2.)



Plate 2: Portrait from a Newar photographic studio, circa 1940 (Monks)

To trade effectively in Tibet, Newar families sent their brothers or sons to the major cities - Lhasa, Shigatse, Gyantse - to live for years at a time. These men learned to speak Tibetan, and took part in the cultural life centred on Buddhism. Many married Tibetan wives. Newars in Tibet were of several kinds: some extended successful family businesses from Kathmandu and prospered dramatically; others attached themselves as salesman-servants to the dominant Newar trading houses, making little more than a modest wage; and still others went to start new businesses that often failed because they lacked the considerable capital and the web of personal contacts required. Newars in Tibet did cohere as a group, creating *guthis* to celebrate their own festivals and organise themselves in dealing with Tibetan officials (Bista 1978).

3. Summary and conclusions

The Himalayan region can be analysed as a dual frontier that provides terms of analysis for regional (and micro-regional) settlement patterns. This model helps to comprehend the ethnic mosaic of hunter-gatherers displaced or absorbed by migrant peoples colonising sites according to the logic of adapting more intensive subsistence systems to hill environments. Built on such ecological possibilities were galactic networks of economic, political, and

religious organisation that linked isolated peoples to regional and core centres. These interlocking networks define history's gridwork and avenues of cultural diffusion through which core centres have impinged on the periphery. (Through this territorial dialectic, the frontier also shaped the culture hearth centres as well.) Anthropologically, frontier history is thus multiform: migrating hunter-gatherers, subsistence farmers, pastoral nomads, diaspora merchants of diverse origins, missionaries (Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian), pioneering generals and state officials. There were also ascetics, pilgrims, refugees and, in recent years, international development officials who also shaped frontier history. Through the study of ethnic Newar diaspora, I conclude by pointing out how the frontier perspective helps to connect Newar Buddhism to larger issues and processes in South Asian history.

3.1 Buddhist expansion and ethnic boundary maintenance

The usual historical image of Buddhist expansion as a universalistic, missionary tradition assumes the celibate monastic norm, where land-holding monastic networks extend the faith. Across frontiers, I question this as a singular model, noting «householder *samghas*» of Tibet, Nepal, and Japan. The Newar Buddhist diaspora has been built on the logic of group purity defined by short-term monastic initiation. This works exactly like the «Brahman-frontier» model for expansion articulated by John Hitchcock in an important study of Magar communities (1974). In diaspora, then, the Buddhist Śākyas and Vajrācāryas conform to the «Buddhist Brahman» pattern, where adherence to Buddhist tradition is an important and durable principle of ethnic/caste boundary maintenance and group replication. The householder Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna *samgha* of the Newars indicates a Buddhist version of the pan-Indic pattern of religious adaptation and expansion through domestication, confined within narrow ethnic group boundaries.

3.2 Trans-regional networks and local history

The logic of the trans-Himalayan Buddhist trade network affected the evolution of both Nepalese and Tibetan civilisations (Lewis 1989). For at least a thousand years Newars were highly sought-after artisans across Tibet (Macdonald and Stahl 1979; Heller 1986; Bue 1985, 1986), while in more recent times lamas were called to Kathmandu to supervise major renovations of Svayambhū and Baudha (Lewis and Jamspal 1988). This trade/art connection represents an ancient trans-regional pattern: a recent study of Chinese and Kushan merchants has demonstrated that the spread of Buddhist tradition itself motivated frontier trade. The material culture of Buddhist decoration and devotion - silks, gems, metalwork, amulets - itself became a commodity, as monks and merchants crossed the lands synergistically cultivating, respectively, converts and new markets (Liu 1988). The alliances and wealth generated affected the entire network region.

In many domains, Newar Lhasa traders have had a strong effect on their own core tradition. Once lamas with whom they were acquainted arrived in the Kathmandu Valley, the traders made donations to maintain them, sponsored rituals, and built monasteries to insure their local institutional presence. But the tie with Tibet was more important than merely transplanting lamas

and highland monasteries, the often great mercantile profits returned to contribute to Kathmandu's economy, primarily through religious patronage. We know that in this century Lhasa traders restored and made additions to all major indigenous Buddhist shrines throughout Kathmandu city: the directional Buddhas at Svayambhū, Si Gha; Vihāra, the Bijeśvarī complex, Jana Bāhā, and the Annapurna temple in Asan. In addition, they sponsored the majority of extraordinary patronage events to the Newar *samgha* in this century. Thus, we cannot fully understand Buddhist history in the Himalayan region or in the Kathmandu Valley without taking into account the trans-regional relationships that diaspora Newar merchants sustained across the Indo-Tibetan Himalayan frontier.

Notes

1. Writing in the present, of course, requires the internationally-recognised designation of «China» in this formulation. During periods when Chinese imperial power was strong and circumstances arose, there were clearly «Sino-Tibetan» influences across the Himalayan frontier. Evidence of official Chinese presence in the central Himalayas dates from 636 C.E. (Lévi 1900; Slusser 1982: 36) and is institutionalised intermittently through the tribute exchanges that existed from 1415 until the turn of this century between the Nepal *darbar* and the Chinese court (Manandar and Misra 1986).

2. The debate about the ecology of India's sacred cows is long-standing but has not explored the topic in any specific historical or geographic framework. The correlation of expansive Indic traditions involved an interlocking scenario: settlements developed in watersheds amenable to intensive rice cultivation where first the forests were burnt and/or cut, deeds extolled by early Brahmanical texts. Grazing cattle's role in degrading forest lands peripheral to settlements, while providing both traction and dung for fertiliser on cleared agricultural tracts, continues to transform remaining Himalayan «inner frontiers» today.

3. Coercive conversions were also instituted from the Tibetan side as well. The account of Tibetan lamas' first contact with the Lepchas of northern Sikkim demonstrates this dramatically: «...Later the sons of *zo khe bu* and their families came down to Sikkim with their followers, invaded and conquered the country ... At that time Lamaism had nearly reached its peak in Tibet, and the second son ... introduced it into Sikkim. They collected all the Lepcha manuscripts and books containing the historical records, mythology, legends, laws, literature, etc. of the Lepchas and burned them. They took the ashes to the high hills and blew them into the air and built Lamaist monasteries on the hills from which they had scattered the ashes... and forced the Lepcha scribes to translate the Lamaist scriptures ... and venerate them» (Siiger 1967: 28).

4. The widespread travels of prominent Buddhist scholars and saints from India and Tibet should be seen both as spiritual outreach *and* from the perspective of institutional missionising (Wylie 1964; Lewis and Jamspal 1988).

5. Newar religions reflect extensive awareness of and likely contact with religious centres of north India. To cite a few prominent examples: the origin myth of the notable Annapurna temple of Asan Tol, Kathmandu, recounts the fetching of this goddess' essence from Varanasi in a *kalaśa* (Lewis 1984: 101-105); many of the formal, Sanskrit names of prominent Newar *vihāras* are drawn from those of north India (e.g. Vikramaśīla); most Newar *vihāras* also have small *stūpas* in front of the main shrine called «*Asoka caitya*»; the account of the arrival of Avalokiteśvara in the Valley describes a mission to *Kāmarūpa*, i.e. Assam (Locke 1980: 285 ff).

6. Hodgson's statement on the Newar diaspora in the eastern hills bears on the themes developed in this essay (1848: 638-9):

The country between the great valley and the Dud Kosi is not so especially designated after the tribes inhabiting it. But the Newars and Murnis [Tamangs] of Nepal proper are the chief races dwelling there. Of all these tribes the Newars are by much the most advanced in civilisation. They have letters and literature, and are well skilled in the useful and fine arts. Their agriculture is unrivalled; their towns, temples, images of the gods, are beautiful for materials and workmanship; and they are a steady and industrious people equally skilled in handicrafts, commerce, and the culture of the earth. The rest of the highland tribes ... have no letters or literature, no towns, no temples nor images of the gods, no commerce, no handicrafts. All dwell in rude villages or hamlets. Some are fixed, others migratory cultivators perpetually changing their abodes as soon as they have raised a crop or two amid the ashes of the burnt forest. And some, again, prefer raising sheep to agriculture... (1848: 638-9).

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